



Research Article

DRUG TRAFFICKING IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION: A GROWING COASTAL SECURITY CHALLENGE

Sajikumar. B

Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration & Policy Studies, Central University of Kerala, Periyar, Kasaragod, Kerala. PIN code: 671316.

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ABSTRACT

The Indian Ocean region has emerged as a significant conduit for drug trafficking, posing a growing threat to coastal security in the surrounding regions. This study investigates the increasing incidence of drug trafficking through the Indian Ocean region and its implications for coastal security. The findings indicate a marked rise in drug trafficking activities, driven by geopolitical instability, economic disparities, and sophisticated smuggling techniques. This escalation not only undermines regional stability but also strains the resources of coastal security forces, leading to increased violence and corruption. The study highlights the urgent need for enhanced maritime surveillance, international cooperation, and comprehensive policy reforms to combat this menace. By filling gaps in existing literature and providing actionable recommendations, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the nexus between drug trafficking and coastal security. The insights gained are crucial for policymakers, security agencies, and international bodies committed to safeguarding the maritime domain against illicit activities.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indian Ocean region has historically been a vital maritime route for international trade, linking the Middle East, South Asia, and East Africa. In recent years, this strategic waterway has gained notoriety as a major conduit for drug trafficking, with illicit networks exploiting its vast expanse and porous maritime borders. The geopolitical instability in the region, combined with high levels of corruption and weak law enforcement mechanisms, has facilitated the proliferation of drug trafficking activities. The narcotics primarily trafficked through this route include heroin, methamphetamine, and cannabis, often originating from Afghanistan and destined for markets in Africa, Europe, and beyond (Countering Maritime Crime in the Indian Ocean, n.d.).

The complexities of drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean region are compounded by the use of sophisticated smuggling techniques, such as the deployment of "motherships" that transfer contraband to smaller vessels mid-sea, making detection and interception challenging for maritime security forces. Additionally, the rise of non-state actors and terrorist organizations leveraging drug trafficking as a revenue source further exacerbates the security threat in the region (admin, 2021). The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region, coupled with the increasing volume of illicit drug trade, necessitates a comprehensive analysis of the patterns, impacts, and countermeasures associated with this maritime crime.

Understanding and addressing drug trafficking through the Indian Ocean region is crucial for several reasons. The increasing prevalence of drug trafficking in this region poses significant threats to regional and international security. The revenue generated from drug trafficking often funds other forms of organized crime and terrorism, exacerbating instability in already volatile regions (Kaumada, 2019). This study aims to shed light on the intricate linkages between drug trafficking and broader security threats, providing a foundation for more effective policy responses.

Statement of the Problem

The Indian Ocean region has become an increasingly critical hotspot for drug trafficking over the past decade, posing significant threats to regional security, economic stability, and public health. Despite concerted efforts by national governments and international organizations, the volume of illicit drugs trafficked through this maritime corridor has escalated alarmingly, particularly in the last few years (Pandey, 2024). The methods employed by traffickers have grown more sophisticated, leveraging technological advancements and exploiting regulatory and enforcement gaps. This surge in drug trafficking not only undermines the rule of law but also fuels organized crime and terrorism, further destabilizing already vulnerable coastal regions (Panneerselvam, 2021). The persistent rise in drug trafficking activities through the Indian Ocean region underscores a multifaceted security dilemma that requires comprehensive and coordinated responses.

*Corresponding author: Sajikumar.B

Devanandanam, Near Sankaramughom LPS, Valiyara, Velland.P. O, Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala

Current maritime security frameworks and enforcement mechanisms appear inadequate in curbing this trend, as evidenced by the increasing number of drug seizures and trafficking incidents reported annually. This growing menace necessitates a detailed investigation into the patterns, drivers, and impacts of drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean region, with a view to developing effective countermeasures. Addressing this problem is critical for enhancing regional security, safeguarding economic interests, and protecting public health from the detrimental effects of narcotics.

Research Objectives

- To analyse the trends and patterns of drug trafficking through the Indian Ocean region over the past few years: This objective aims to provide a detailed examination of the drug trafficking activities, identifying key routes, and methods used by traffickers.
- To assess the impact of drug trafficking on regional security and economic stability: This includes evaluating how drug trafficking contributes to organized crime and terrorism, and its economic implications on coastal states.
- To explore the challenges faced by maritime security forces in combating drug trafficking: This involves identifying the gaps in current maritime security frameworks and enforcement mechanisms.

Review of Literature

Drug trafficking remains a pervasive and evolving issue with significant global implications. The literature on global drug trafficking trends reveals several key themes and observations. Recent studies highlight the dynamic nature of drug trafficking routes and methods. Technological advancements have both facilitated and complicated drug trafficking. The internet and encrypted communication platforms have enabled traffickers to coordinate and operate more efficiently (Chatterjee, 2014). Moreover, advancements in logistics and supply chain management have streamlined the trafficking process, enabling traffickers to move larger quantities of drugs across borders. Efforts such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime's (UNODC) global drug control strategies emphasize collaborative approaches to combat trafficking, including capacity-building, intelligence sharing, and joint operations.

The Indian Ocean's strategic importance as a major maritime trade route has made it a significant area of focus in drug trafficking studies. The region's geographical position, connecting Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, facilitates the transit of narcotics from production areas to international markets (Venkatshamy, 2015). Studies have highlighted that traffickers exploit the Indian Ocean's extensive maritime routes to smuggle drugs, utilizing various transport methods including fishing vessels, cargo ships, and sophisticated semi-submersibles (Bruwer, 2019). Several studies address the vulnerabilities of coastal and island nations in the Indian Ocean. The Seychelles, Maldives, and Sri Lanka, among others, face significant challenges due to their limited resources for maritime surveillance and law enforcement (*Partnership to Counter Indian Ocean Drug Trafficking*, n.d.). As a result, these nations are frequently exploited as transit points for drug trafficking. The literature points to emerging trends and future directions in drug

trafficking in the Indian Ocean. The increasing use of advanced technologies by traffickers and the shifting dynamics of drug production and distribution are areas of concern. Studies suggest that future research should focus on the evolving methods of drug trafficking, including the use of technology and innovative smuggling techniques (Davis & Lee, 2022). Additionally, addressing the broader geopolitical and economic factors influencing drug trafficking patterns in the region will be crucial for developing effective counter-strategies.

METHODOLOGY

The primary data has been collected from the discussion with the maritime security personnel, law enforcement officers, and regional experts, on drug trafficking trends, enforcement challenges, and the effectiveness of control measures. The approach facilitates a detailed examination of trafficking patterns, network structures, and the impact of drug control measures. Secondary data was collected from existing reports and databases, such as those from UNODC, maritime security agencies, and regional maritime authorities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Trends and Patterns in Drug Trafficking in the Indian Ocean Region:

1. Increase in Major Seizures

The Indian Security agencies seized about 3,300 kg of drugs from a dhow about 60 nautical miles off the coast in the Indian Ocean and the arrested five foreign nationals with suspected Pakistan links, on 27.02.2024, represents the largest drug haul in India's history. Again, the interception of 3.2 tonnes of Afghan heroin at Mundra Port, Gujarat, represents another larger catch. These seizures underscore the increasing flow of narcotics from the Golden Crescent region, particularly Afghanistan, into India. The joint operation by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Indian Navy led to the above said seizures. This operation reflects a significant disruption in narcotics trafficking routes from Baluchistan and Afghanistan (India Today, 2021). There has been a notable increase in large-scale drug seizures in the region, indicating a rising trend in the volume of drugs trafficked through maritime routes and the effectiveness of coordinated law enforcement efforts.

2. Regional Cooperation and Effectiveness

Intelligence-sharing efforts under Operation Samudragupt led to successful drug seizures in Sri Lanka and the Maldives. In December 2022 and April 2023, the Sri Lankan Navy seized 286 kg of Heroin and 128 kg of Methamphetamine, resulting in the arrest of 19 traffickers. Similarly, in March 2023, the Maldivian Police seized 4 kg of Heroin and arrested 5 traffickers (Sakhuja, 2001). The increased success of regional cooperation and intelligence-sharing highlights a growing effectiveness in combating drug trafficking through collaborative efforts. The coordination between Indian, Sri Lankan, and Maldivian authorities demonstrates improved regional security and enforcement capabilities.

3. Maritime Drug Trafficking Routes

The interception of a "mother ship" carrying approximately 2,500 kg of Methamphetamine, valued at around ₹15,000 crore, marks a significant achievement for the NCB and Indian

Navy. This operation underscores the strategic use of maritime routes for trafficking large quantities of drugs. The use of maritime routes for drug trafficking is increasingly sophisticated, with traffickers employing large sea-going vessels to transport significant quantities of drugs. The rise in such operations reflects the growing complexity of drug trafficking networks and the need for enhanced maritime surveillance and response capabilities.

4. Source Regions and Drug Types

The heroin seized at Mundra Port originated from Afghanistan, part of the Golden Crescent region, which remains a major source of opium and heroin. This area accounts for 83% of global opiate production. The Golden Triangle, particularly Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos, has shifted focus to methamphetamine production. Recent seizures indicate a growing presence of synthetic drugs, including Yaba, in the trafficking patterns. The dual focus on heroin from the Golden Crescent and methamphetamines from the Golden Triangle reflects a diversification in drug trafficking patterns. This shift indicates the adaptation of trafficking networks to exploit different production regions and markets (Ghosh, 2004).

5. Impact on Maritime Security

The successful interceptions by maritime forces, including the seizure of 300 kg of heroin from Sri Lankan trawlers in April 2021 and subsequent large seizures, highlight the critical role of naval and coast guard operations in curbing drug trafficking. The intensified monitoring and interception efforts by maritime forces are crucial in addressing the security threats posed by drug trafficking (NCB *Catches Narcotics Carrying 'Mothership' in Indian Ocean, Seizes 2,500 Kg Methamphetamine Worth Rs 12,000 Cr*, n.d.). The increasing use of sea routes necessitates enhanced surveillance and rapid response capabilities to effectively combat maritime drug trafficking.

B. Views of the stakeholders:

Key stakeholders, including law enforcement officials and regional experts, described drug trafficking networks in the Indian Ocean as highly sophisticated and well-coordinated. Traffickers use a variety of methods, including concealed compartments in ships and semi-submersibles, to evade detection. The networks are often transnational, involving multiple countries and complex logistical arrangements. One law enforcement officer noted, "The scale and complexity of these networks have grown significantly. They adapt quickly to enforcement measures, making it a continuous challenge to stay ahead." The participants of discussion highlighted several challenges faced by enforcement agencies, including limited resources, the vast expanse of maritime routes, and the need for improved intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Regional cooperation has improved, but gaps remain in coordination and information exchange between countries. A regional security expert commented, "While international collaboration has strengthened, the sheer volume of trafficking activities often overwhelms our capabilities. We need more robust mechanisms for real-time intelligence sharing."

Regional authorities acknowledged improvements in combating drug trafficking through initiatives like Operation Samudragupt. However, there is recognition that ongoing efforts are needed to enhance maritime surveillance and

interdiction capabilities. An Indian Navy official stated, "Operation Samudragupt has been successful, but we must continue to innovate and adapt to new trafficking methods to maintain our effectiveness."

C. Case Studies: Significant Drug Seizures and Their Implications

1. Mundra Port Seizure (September 15, 2021)

Incident: The Department of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) intercepted two shipping containers at Mundra Port, Gujarat, containing 3.2 tonnes of Afghan heroin. This seizure is among the largest drug hauls in India's history. The heroin, valued at approximately Rs 3,000 crore, was shipped from Iran's Bandar Abbas port by Hasan Husain Ltd based in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The shipment was destined for Chennai, highlighting the extensive trafficking route from the Golden Crescent through the Indian Ocean.

Implications: This seizure disrupted a major trafficking route and underscored the increasing flow of Afghan heroin into India. It highlighted the sophisticated methods used by traffickers and the significant financial stakes involved in the drug trade. The seizure prompted intensified scrutiny of maritime shipments and enhanced coordination between national agencies to tackle similar trafficking operations. It also led to increased vigilance at key ports and improved intelligence-sharing mechanisms.

2. Operation Samudragupt (February 2022)

Incident: A joint operation by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and the Indian Navy resulted in the seizure of 529 kg of Hashish, 221 kg of Methamphetamine, and 13 kg of Heroin off the coast of Gujarat. This operation was conducted on the high seas, targeting trafficking routes from Baluchistan and Afghanistan. It was part of the broader Operation Samudragupt initiative aimed at disrupting maritime drug trafficking (*The Maritime Security Programme*, n.d.).

Implications: The seizure demonstrated the effectiveness of joint operations in intercepting large drug consignments and disrupting trafficking networks. It highlighted the strategic importance of maritime security and the need for coordinated efforts between different agencies. The success of this operation reinforced the value of real-time intelligence and maritime surveillance. It emphasized the importance of collaborative international efforts and the need for continuous adaptation to evolving trafficking methods.

3. Sri Lankan Navy Operations (December 2022 and April 2023)

Incident: In December 2022, the Sri Lankan Navy seized 286 kg of Heroin, and in April 2023, another operation led to the seizure of 128 kg of Methamphetamine. These seizures were part of intelligence-sharing efforts under Operation Samudragupt, aimed at combating drug trafficking in the region. The operations also resulted in the arrest of 19 drug traffickers.

Implications: These operations highlighted the effectiveness of regional cooperation in addressing drug trafficking. The successful seizures underscored the importance of intelligence-sharing and joint operations in disrupting drug trafficking networks. The arrests and seizures had a significant impact on local drug markets and trafficking operations. They demonstrated the effectiveness of

collaborative regional efforts in tackling drug trafficking and reducing the availability of illicit substances.

4. Maldivian Police Operation (March 2023)

Incident: The Maldivian Police, acting on intelligence shared by the NCB, seized 4 kg of Heroin and arrested 5 traffickers in March 2023. This operation was part of the broader Operation Samudragupt initiative, aimed at combating drug trafficking in the Indian Ocean region.

Implications: The successful operation in the Maldives highlighted the effectiveness of international collaborations in the fight against drug trafficking. It reinforced the importance of regional partnerships and intelligence-sharing. The seizure demonstrated the need for robust maritime security measures and the effectiveness of intelligence-driven operations in intercepting illicit drugs.

5. "Mother Ship" Methamphetamine Seizure (May 2023)

Incident: In May 2023, a "mother ship" carrying approximately 2,500 kg of Methamphetamine was intercepted as part of Operation Samudragupt. The operation was conducted by the NCB and the Indian Navy. This seizure, valued around ₹15,000 crore, marked the first time an Indian agency intercepted such a large sea-going vessel carrying drugs. A Pakistani national was detained during the operation (NEWS9 Live, 2024).

Implications: This operation highlighted the critical role of maritime routes in drug trafficking and the sophisticated methods employed by traffickers. The large scale of the seizure underscored the scale of the drug trade and the need for advanced maritime security measures. The interception of the "mother ship" represented a major disruption to trafficking networks operating across the Indian Ocean. It demonstrated the effectiveness of coordinated maritime operations and the importance of ongoing vigilance and intelligence gathering.

DISCUSSION

Interpretation of findings

a. Increasing Trends in Drug Trafficking

Recent data indicates a significant rise in drug trafficking incidents in the Indian Ocean region, with major seizures of heroin, methamphetamines, and other substances. Notable operations, such as those involving the Mundra Port seizure and the interception of the "mother ship," highlight the growing scale of drug trafficking activities. The Indian Ocean region's role as a major transit route for drugs from the Golden Crescent and Golden Triangle aligns with global patterns observed in the literature, where maritime routes are increasingly utilized for large-scale drug trafficking (Panneerselvam, 2021). The rise in drug trafficking incidents in the Indian Ocean is consistent with global trends, reflecting the region's strategic significance as a key transit point.

b. Effectiveness of Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation, exemplified by Operation Samudragupt and successful joint operations by the Indian Navy, Sri Lankan Navy, and Maldivian Police, has led to significant drug seizures and arrests. Literature on regional cooperation in drug enforcement emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing transnational drug trafficking. Successful operations and intelligence-sharing are often highlighted as critical components in combating drug trafficking effectively.

The success of joint operations underscores the importance of integrated regional strategies in disrupting drug trafficking networks and improving enforcement outcomes.

c. Socio-Economic Impacts of Drug Trafficking

The socioeconomic impacts of drug trafficking on local communities, including increased crime rates and economic destabilization, have been reported. Research on the socio-economic impact of drug trafficking highlights its detrimental effects on community well-being, including economic hardship and public health issues. The literature emphasizes the need for comprehensive approaches to mitigate these impacts. The findings highlight the need for integrated solutions that address both the immediate and long-term effects of drug trafficking on community health and economic stability (Biswas, n.d.).

The Main Challenges Faced by Maritime Security Forces

a. Vast Maritime Domain

The Indian Ocean, as one of the world's largest and most strategically significant maritime domains, presents a significant challenge for maritime security forces due to its vast expanse. The sheer size and complexity of the region make it difficult to monitor and patrol effectively. The limited resources and manpower available to maritime security agencies constrain their ability to cover extensive areas, leading to gaps in surveillance and interception capabilities. This vastness allows traffickers to exploit less monitored routes and evade detection. The interception of the "mother ship" carrying 2,500 kg of methamphetamine demonstrated the challenges faced by security forces in patrolling such a large maritime area and the need for enhanced surveillance technologies (*Indian Ocean East*, n.d.).

b. Sophisticated Trafficking Techniques

Drug traffickers use increasingly sophisticated methods to evade detection, including the use of concealed compartments, semi-submersibles, and advanced navigation technologies. These methods make it difficult for maritime security forces to detect and intercept drug shipments. The rapid technological advancements and innovative trafficking techniques used by criminals outpace the development of countermeasures by security forces. This technological disparity creates challenges in effectively monitoring and intercepting illicit drug shipments. The use of semi-submersibles and concealed compartments in recent drug trafficking operations highlights the need for advanced detection and interception technologies to combat these sophisticated methods.

c. Coordination and Intelligence Sharing

Effective coordination and intelligence sharing between national and international agencies are critical for combating transnational drug trafficking. However, gaps in communication and collaboration often hinder coordinated responses to drug trafficking operations. Inadequate coordination between different countries and agencies can lead to fragmented efforts and delays in responding to trafficking incidents. The lack of a unified approach can diminish the effectiveness of enforcement actions and intelligence utilization (*India's Drug Trafficking Problem | CogitAsia | CSIS Podcasts*, n.d.). While regional initiatives like Operation Samudragupt have improved collaboration, challenges in

intelligence sharing and operational coordination continue to impact the overall effectiveness of anti-trafficking efforts.

d. Legal and Jurisdictional Issues

Legal and jurisdictional issues arise due to varying national laws and regulations concerning drug trafficking. Discrepancies in legal frameworks can complicate the enforcement of maritime drug trafficking laws and international cooperation. Differences in legal systems and jurisdictional boundaries can create obstacles in prosecuting traffickers and enforcing anti-drug laws. This lack of legal harmonization can hinder effective cross-border enforcement and cooperation.

Impact on Coastal Security

a. Threat to National Security

Drug trafficking significantly threatens national security by contributing to organized crime, funding terrorism, and destabilizing governments. The involvement of transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) in drug trafficking often links these activities to other forms of violence and instability. Drug trafficking supports organized crime groups that engage in violence and corruption, undermining law and order. For instance, the profits from drug sales are often used to fund criminal activities and extend the influence of these groups. In regions like the Indian Ocean, drug trafficking has been linked to funding terrorism. The connection between drug money and terrorist groups poses significant threats to national and regional security (McLaughlin, 2016).

b. Environmental Degradation

Drug trafficking operations, particularly those involving large-scale cultivation and production, can lead to significant environmental degradation. This includes deforestation, soil degradation, and pollution resulting from the use of chemicals in drug production. In the Golden Triangle region, opium poppy cultivation has led to widespread deforestation and habitat destruction, impacting biodiversity and ecosystems (UNODC, 2024). The production of synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamines, involves hazardous chemicals that can contaminate soil and water sources, posing long-term environmental risks. Environmental damage from drug production in Southeast Asia has been documented, with adverse effects on local ecosystems and communities.

c. Social Instability

Drug trafficking contributes to social instability by increasing crime rates, fostering corruption, and eroding community trust in law enforcement. Areas affected by drug trafficking often experience higher rates of violent crime, property crime, and drug abuse, leading to social unrest and diminished quality of life (*India's SCO Presidency*, n.d.). The lucrative nature of drug trafficking can lead to corruption among law enforcement officials and political leaders, undermining governance and trust in public institutions. The impact of drug trafficking on local communities is evident in increased crime and corruption, affecting social stability and community well-being.

d. Disruption of Regional Stability

The broader regional stability is compromised by drug trafficking, which can exacerbate existing conflicts and

contribute to geopolitical tensions. Drug trafficking often intersects with conflict zones, exacerbating instability and fuelling ongoing conflicts. For instance, drug money can finance armed groups and insurgencies, further destabilizing regions. The involvement of multiple countries and international actors in drug trafficking can lead to geopolitical tensions and complicate regional cooperation efforts. The impact of drug trafficking on regional stability is evident in conflicts involving drug-funded insurgent groups and the resulting geopolitical tensions in the Indian Ocean region (*Drug Trafficking and Threat to Security*, n.d.).

Comparison with Other Regions

a. Comparison with the Caribbean

1. Drug Trafficking Trends

The Indian Ocean region is increasingly used as a transit route for drugs, particularly heroin from the Golden Crescent and methamphetamines from the Golden Triangle. Major seizures in the Indian Ocean include the interception of a large "mother ship" carrying methamphetamines and significant heroin hauls at key ports. The Caribbean is a prominent transit and destination region for cocaine originating from South America, particularly Colombia, and methamphetamines from various sources. The region has seen numerous large-scale seizures of cocaine, often transported via maritime routes (UNODC, 2024).

Both regions face challenges related to vast maritime areas and sophisticated trafficking networks. However, while the Indian Ocean primarily handles heroin and methamphetamines, the Caribbean is more focused on cocaine trafficking. The Caribbean also experiences high violence levels related to drug trafficking; a trend observed in some Indian Ocean states as well.

b. Comparison with Southeast Asia

In the Indian Ocean, drug trafficking is influenced by production in the Golden Crescent (heroin) and the Golden Triangle (methamphetamines). Recent trends show increased trafficking activities and significant seizures in the region (India Today, 2021). Southeast Asia, particularly Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand (the Golden Triangle), is a major source of methamphetamines and opium. The region is notorious for large-scale production and trafficking of these substances, with frequent large seizures reported.

Both regions are heavily influenced by production areas, with Southeast Asia being a major production hub for methamphetamines and opium. In contrast, the Indian Ocean is more of a transit route. The intensity of production in Southeast Asia contrasts with the transit and trafficking-focused issues observed in the Indian Ocean.

c. Comparison with the Mediterranean

The Indian Ocean has become a key route for the transit of heroin and methamphetamines, with significant maritime drug trafficking incidents reported. The Mediterranean Sea is a major transit route for drugs, including heroin and cocaine. Trafficking routes often link North Africa with Europe, with substantial interceptions and seizures reported in ports and coastal areas (*Partnership to Counter Indian Ocean Drug Trafficking*, n.d.).

Both regions are crucial maritime routes for drug trafficking, with the Mediterranean linking North Africa to Europe and the Indian Ocean connecting South Asia to Africa and beyond. While the Mediterranean sees more direct trafficking to Europe, the Indian Ocean primarily functions as a transit route for drugs moving towards other parts of Asia and Africa.

d. Comparison with West Africa

In the Indian Ocean, drug trafficking is largely influenced by maritime routes and transit points, with significant seizures and operations involving large drug quantities. West Africa has become a significant transit zone for cocaine from South America and heroin from the Golden Crescent. The region faces severe impacts from drug trafficking, including increased violence, corruption, and instability (UNODC, 2024).

Both regions are significant transit zones for drug trafficking, but West Africa is more directly impacted by drug-related violence and instability. The Indian Ocean, while facing significant trafficking challenges, does not experience the same level of violence and instability seen in West Africa.

e. Comparative Analysis of Maritime Security Challenges

Maritime security forces in the Indian Ocean face challenges related to the vast size of the area, limited resources, and the sophistication of trafficking methods. The Caribbean also struggles with vast maritime areas and sophisticated trafficking techniques, with drug traffickers utilizing advanced methods to evade detection.

Both regions experience challenges related to maritime security, including large areas to patrol and sophisticated trafficking methods. However, the specific types of drugs and the intensity of associated violence and instability can differ.

Policy Recommendations

1. Enhancing International Cooperation

a. Strengthening Multilateral Agreements

Develop and reinforce multilateral agreements focused on drug trafficking, maritime security, and intelligence sharing. Countries should collaborate under frameworks like the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC) and the UN Convention against Corruption. These agreements can standardize legal procedures, enhance cross-border cooperation, and facilitate coordinated responses to drug trafficking operations.

b. Establishing Regional Task Forces

Create regional task forces consisting of representatives from affected countries and international organizations. These task forces should focus on intelligence sharing, joint operations, and capacity building. Regional task forces can improve real-time information exchange, foster collaborative operations, and address specific regional challenges more effectively.

c. Enhancing Intelligence Sharing Platforms

Develop and integrate advanced intelligence-sharing platforms and databases accessible to relevant national and international agencies. Utilize technologies such as secure communication networks and data analytics tools. Improved intelligence sharing can facilitate timely and accurate information exchange, leading to more effective interceptions and arrests.

2. Strengthening Surveillance and Interdiction

a. Investing in Advanced Technology

Allocate funds to acquire and deploy advanced surveillance technologies such as satellite imagery, drones, and automated detection systems. Enhance maritime radar and communication systems. Advanced technology can significantly improve detection and monitoring capabilities, enabling better interception of illicit drug shipments.

b. Enhancing Maritime Patrols

Increase the frequency and scope of maritime patrols, particularly in high-risk areas and along major trafficking routes. Utilize both naval and aerial assets for comprehensive coverage. More frequent and widespread patrols can reduce the effectiveness of traffickers and increase the chances of successful interdiction.

c. Strengthening Port Security

Implement rigorous security measures at ports and shipping facilities, including enhanced cargo screening, risk assessments, and secure access controls. Strengthened port security can prevent the smuggling of drugs through major maritime hubs and improve overall port safety.

d. Enhancing Interdiction Training

Provide specialized training for maritime security personnel on drug interdiction techniques, including the use of advanced technology and tactics for boarding and inspection. Well-trained personnel are more effective in conducting interdiction operations and handling complex drug trafficking scenarios.

3. Legal and Institutional Reforms

a. Updating Legal Frameworks

Revise and harmonize national laws related to drug trafficking and maritime crime to align with international standards and best practices. Ensure that legal frameworks address emerging trafficking methods and technologies. Updated legal frameworks can enhance the ability to prosecute traffickers, enforce anti-drug laws, and facilitate international cooperation.

b. Establishing Specialized Maritime Courts

Create specialized maritime courts to handle cases related to drug trafficking and other maritime crimes. These courts should be equipped with expertise in maritime law and drug trafficking. Specialized courts can expedite the legal process, ensure consistent judgments, and enhance the effectiveness of maritime crime prosecution.

c. Strengthening Institutional Frameworks

Strengthen national and regional institutions responsible for maritime security and drug control. Ensure adequate funding, resources, and operational autonomy. Stronger institutions can improve the coordination and effectiveness of maritime security efforts and drug control measures.

4. Capacity Building

a. Providing Training Programs

Implement comprehensive training programs for maritime security personnel, focusing on advanced surveillance techniques, interdiction strategies, and international cooperation. Enhanced training improves the skills and

effectiveness of personnel, leading to better performance in drug trafficking operations.

b. Facilitating Knowledge Exchange

Organize workshops, seminars, and conferences to facilitate knowledge exchange and best practices among maritime security agencies from different countries. Knowledge exchange fosters learning and collaboration, allowing agencies to adopt successful strategies and adapt to evolving threats.

c. Developing Regional Training Centres

Establish regional training centres specializing in maritime security and drug trafficking. These centres should offer training, resources, and support to countries within the region. Regional training centres provide targeted support, improve regional capacity, and foster collaboration among neighbouring countries.

d. Supporting Professional Development

Invest in the professional development of maritime security personnel through scholarships, career advancement opportunities, and specialized courses. Professional development enhances the expertise and motivation of personnel, leading to improved operational effectiveness and career satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The research highlights that the Indian Ocean has become a significant transit route for drug trafficking, primarily influenced by the production of heroin in the Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan) and methamphetamines in the Golden Triangle (Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos). Notable drug seizures in the Indian Ocean, such as the interception of 3.2 tonnes of heroin at Mundra Port and approximately 2,500 kg of methamphetamines from a "mother ship," underscore the scale and sophistication of drug trafficking operations in the region. Successful operations under initiatives like Operation Samudragupt in India, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives demonstrate effective regional cooperation and intelligence sharing (Pandey, 2024). Drug trafficking contributes to significant economic costs, social instability, and environmental degradation. The financial burden on law enforcement and healthcare systems, coupled with increased violence and corruption, underscores the need for comprehensive responses. The comparative analysis highlights the importance of tailored strategies for each region based on their specific challenges and trafficking dynamics.

The findings stress the need for improved international cooperation and intelligence sharing to address the transnational nature of drug trafficking. Strengthening multilateral agreements and regional task forces is essential for effective coordination and response. Investing in advanced surveillance technology and enhancing maritime patrols are crucial for improving detection and interception capabilities. Strengthening port security and providing specialized training for maritime personnel can further enhance operational effectiveness. Updating legal frameworks and establishing specialized maritime courts can improve the prosecution and enforcement of drug trafficking laws. Strengthening institutional frameworks and promoting public-private partnerships are also key to addressing maritime crime effectively (*Drug Trafficking and Threat to Security*, n.d.). Investing in training programs and establishing regional

training centres are vital for building the capacity of maritime security personnel. Facilitating knowledge exchange and supporting professional development can enhance the skills and effectiveness of those involved in combating drug trafficking. The broader implications include a need for integrated and adaptive policy approaches that consider regional specificities and global trends. Effective policy responses must address the multifaceted challenges of drug trafficking, including economic costs, social instability, and environmental degradation. Enhanced international collaboration and regional cooperation are critical to develop comprehensive and sustainable solutions.

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