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THEME:

Combatting Piracy in the Western Indian Ocean: Strategic Pathways for Eastern Africa

The resurgence of piracy in the Western Indian Ocean underscores the need for Eastern Africa to move beyond reactive military responses toward a comprehensive regional maritime governance strategy. Sustainable maritime security depends on strengthening Maritime Domain Awareness, harmonising legal frameworks, and building indigenous institutional and technological capabilities. Protecting the Blue Economy requires integrating maritime security with sustainable fisheries, climate resilience and coastal development to address the socio-economic drivers of piracy. Strategic partnerships should prioritise technology transfer, innovation and industrial development while reinforcing regional ownership. At the same time, disrupting piracy demands targeting the broader transnational criminal networks and illicit financial flows that sustain maritime crime. A common Eastern Africa Maritime Strategy anchored in integrated ocean governance would strengthen policy coherence, collective bargaining power, strategic autonomy and long-term maritime resilience.

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Monday 3rd August 2026

Enhancing Maritime Security in Eastern Africa to Curb Piracy in the Western Indian Ocean

No maritime corridor can remain secure when its protection depends predominantly on external military presence. The Western Indian Ocean carries nearly a third of global seaborne trade and remains central to Eastern Africa's economic integration, energy security and international commerce. Yet the resurgence of piracy during 2025–2026 demonstrates that maritime security gains achieved over the past decade remain vulnerable to shifting geopolitical priorities. Against this background, Eastern African states face an urgent strategic imperative to transition from externally supported maritime security towards regional maritime strategic autonomy.

The success of international counter piracy operations and the Djibouti Code of Conduct significantly reduced Somali piracy after its 2011 peak of 237 recorded attacks. However, recent incidents, including the July 2026 hijacking of the Tanzanian flagged tanker MT ASANA, reveal that pirate networks have adapted faster than regional security institutions. Rather than signalling the failure of previous interventions, these incidents expose the limitations of a security model that prioritised tactical suppression over long-term institutional resilience. Maritime security should therefore be viewed as a permanent governance capability rather than a temporary crisis response.

Achieving regional maritime strategic autonomy requires Eastern Africa to develop an integrated maritime security ecosystem. Maritime Domain Awareness should evolve beyond surveillance by linking satellite imagery, coastal radar, Automatic Identification System data, artificial intelligence enabled analytics and maritime intelligence into a common regional operating picture. Such interoperability would enable predictive threat assessment, coordinated operational planning and faster responses to emerging security risks while reducing the fragmented decision making that criminal actors exploit.

Equally important is strengthening the legal and institutional foundations of regional maritime security. Variations in national legislation, prosecutorial capacity and evidentiary standards continue to undermine cross border investigations despite progress under the Djibouti Code of

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Conduct. Harmonizing maritime legislation, expanding mutual legal assistance agreements and establishing specialized regional maritime prosecution mechanisms would increase the certainty of prosecution, strengthen deterrence and reduce safe havens for maritime offenders.

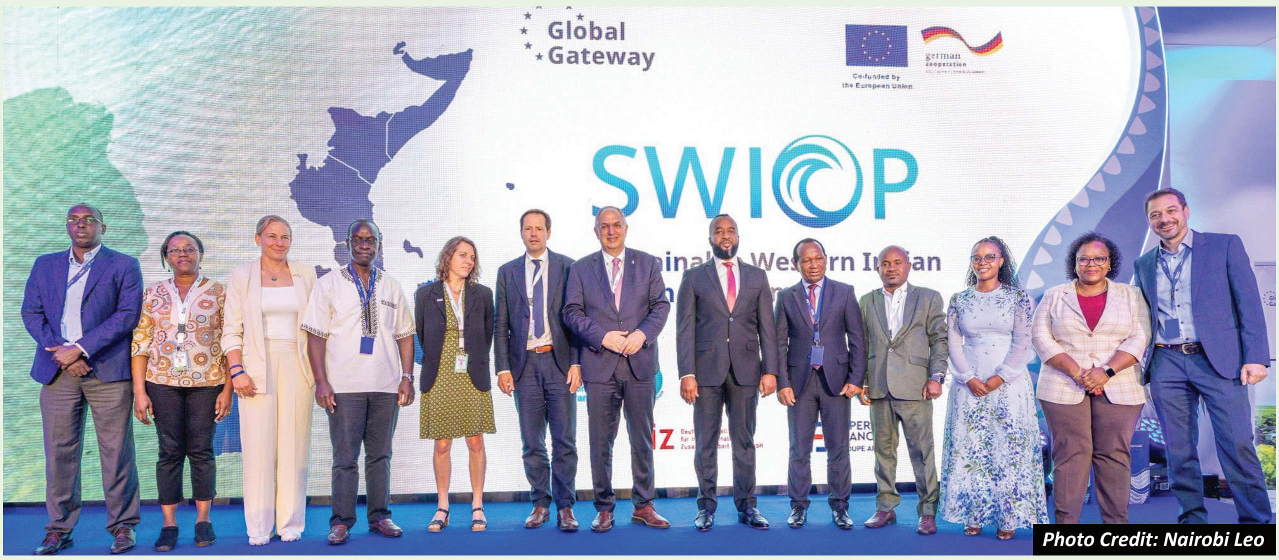
Looking ahead, the strategic challenge extends beyond responding to piracy incidents. Emerging technologies, evolving shipping patterns and intensifying geopolitical competition will increasingly shape maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean. Eastern African states that invest today in integrated institutions, interoperable technologies and collective regional capabilities will be better positioned to secure critical sea lanes, protect maritime commerce and strengthen their strategic influence within the rapidly evolving Indo-Pacific maritime order.

Tuesday 4th August 2026

Piracy and the Blue Economy: Safeguarding Sustainable Maritime Development in the Western Indian Ocean

The Western Indian Ocean is rapidly emerging as one of Eastern Africa's most valuable strategic assets, not only because of its shipping lanes but also because of its immense Blue Economy potential. Fisheries, maritime transport, coastal tourism, offshore energy, marine biotechnology and emerging ocean industries are increasingly viewed as engines of economic transformation, employment and regional integration. However, the sustainability of these opportunities depends on secure and well-governed maritime spaces. The resurgence of piracy therefore represents more than a maritime security concern. It is a growing threat to the region's long-term economic competitiveness and sustainable ocean development.

Traditional counter-piracy approaches have primarily focused on safeguarding commercial shipping and deterring attacks at sea. While these interventions remain necessary, recent thinking on ocean governance increasingly argues that maritime security should be integrated into broader Blue Economy strategies rather than treated as a separate policy domain. Piracy disrupts



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maritime value chains by increasing shipping insurance premiums, delaying cargo movements, discouraging foreign investment, and weakening confidence in regional ports and logistics corridors. These effects extend well beyond coastal communities, influencing trade competitiveness, food systems and the implementation of regional initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Building a resilient Blue Economy therefore requires strengthening Blue Economy security, an approach that protects marine resources while enhancing economic resilience and environmental sustainability. Eastern African states should modernise fisheries governance through ecosystem-based management, strengthen measures against Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing and improve the management of shared marine resources. Expanding investment in fisheries value addition, aquaculture, sustainable coastal tourism, and marine processing industries would create higher-value employment while reducing dependence on vulnerable extractive activities. Strengthening the capacity of Beach Management Units and community-based marine conservation initiatives would further reinforce local stewardship of marine ecosystems and improve compliance with sustainable fisheries management.

Climate change adds another strategic dimension to maritime insecurity. Rising sea temperatures, coastal erosion and declining fish stocks are intensifying competition over marine resources, increasing economic pressures on vulnerable coastal populations and creating conditions that organized criminal networks can exploit. Integrating climate adaptation, marine spatial planning and disaster resilience into Blue Economy policies would strengthen the capacity of coastal communities to withstand both environmental and security shocks while promoting sustainable livelihoods.

Safeguarding the Blue Economy ultimately requires recognising that economic resilience and maritime security are mutually reinforcing rather than competing priorities. Eastern African states that invest in resilient marine governance and sustainable coastal development will r educe the structural incentives for piracy.

Wednesday 5th August 2026

The Role of Strategic Partnerships in Combating Piracy in the Western Indian Ocean

The Western Indian Ocean has become an increasingly important geopolitical crossroads where maritime security, economic connectivity, and strategic competition are converging. As global powers expand their engagement across the Indo Pacific, the region has evolved from a critical maritime trade corridor into a theatre of strategic competition where security, technology, infrastructure and supply chains increasingly intersect. This changing geopolitical landscape presents Eastern Africa with an unprecedented opportunity to reposition international partnerships from short-term counter piracy cooperation towards long-term capability development.

The success of multinational counter piracy operations over the past decade demonstrated the value of coordinated international action in suppressing maritime insecurity. However, recent developments have also exposed the limitations of security arrangements that rely predominantly on external operational support. Sustainable maritime security will therefore depend on Eastern Africa's capacity to develop indigenous institutions, technologies, and human capital capable of responding to evolving maritime threats.

This transition requires moving beyond traditional security assistance towards capability partnerships that prioritise innovation, technology transfer, and institutional transformation. Collaboration with partners such as India, Japan, the European Union and multilateral organisations should increasingly focus on strengthening maritime research, artificial intelligence enabled maritime surveillance, satellite applications, hydrographic services, cybersecurity and digital port management. Universities, maritime academies, innovation hubs and the private sector should become integral partners in developing locally driven solutions that enhance regional maritime resilience while reducing long-term technological dependence.

Strategic partnerships should equally catalyse the development of competitive maritime industries that contribute to sustainable economic growth. Joint investments in shipbuilding and repair, smart ports, maritime logistics, ocean sciences, renewable marine energy and blue technology industries would strengthen regional competitiveness, diversify maritime economies and create high value employment opportunities. Linking maritime security cooperation with industrial development would transform external partnerships into engines of innovation that generate lasting economic dividends beyond counter piracy operations.

Eastern African institutions must also assume greater leadership in coordinating external engagement. The East African Community, Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the African Union and the Indian Ocean Rim Association should play a stronger role in aligning international assistance with regional priorities. This would reduce institutional fragmentation and promote coherent maritime governance. Such an approach would ensure that external partnerships strengthen regional ownership of maritime security and development initiatives.

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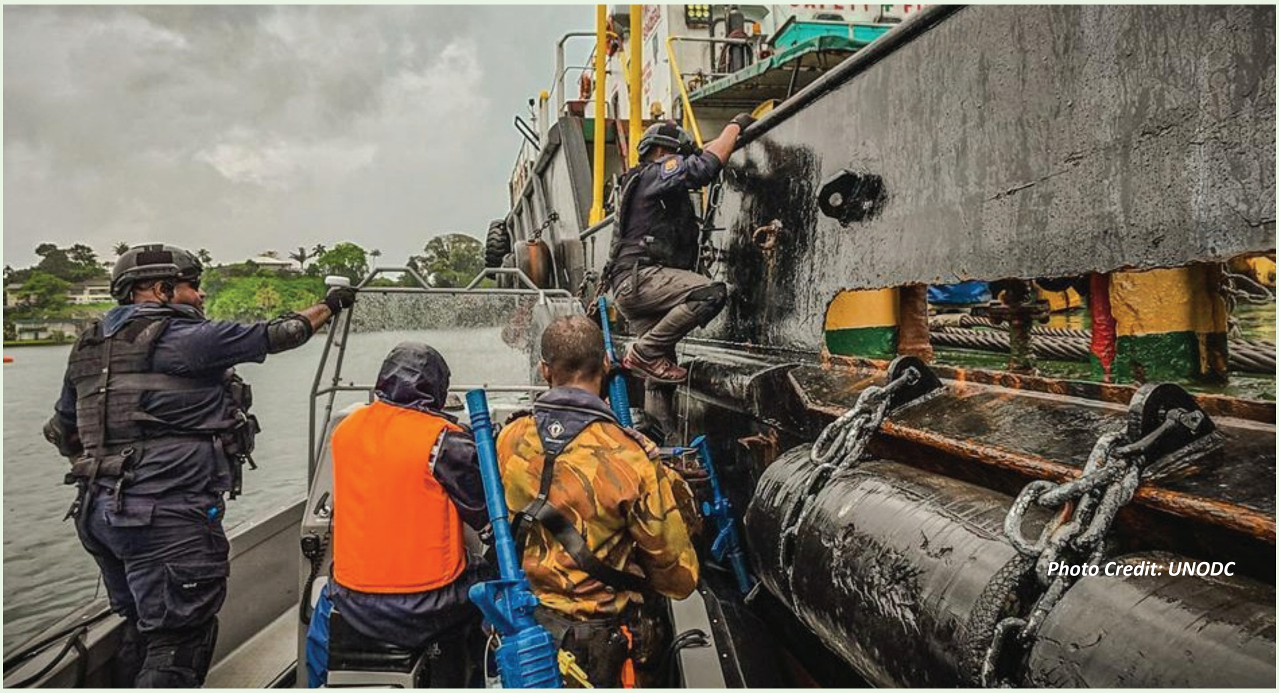
Tackling the Evolution of Piracy and Organized Crime in the Western Indian Ocean

Piracy no longer operates as an isolated maritime crime. It has become one component of increasingly sophisticated transnational criminal markets. Across the Western Indian Ocean, organized criminal networks are integrating piracy with illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, narcotics trafficking, arms smuggling, human trafficking, fuel theft and money laundering. This enables them to diversify revenue streams, share logistics and rapidly adapt to enforcement pressure. This convergence fundamentally alters the nature of maritime insecurity, transforming piracy from a standalone security challenge into a manifestation of broader criminal economies.

Traditional counter-piracy strategies have largely concentrated on intercepting pirate vessels, rescuing hostages, and prosecuting individual perpetrators. While these interventions remain necessary, they have proved insufficient in dismantling the sophisticated criminal ecosystems that finance and sustain maritime crime. Contemporary pirate networks increasingly operate through decentralized structures involving financiers, facilitators, corrupt intermediaries, transport networks and illicit financial channels that extend well beyond the maritime domain. Focusing solely on attacks at sea therefore addresses the symptoms of piracy while leaving its underlying criminal enterprise largely intact.
Eastern African states should adopt a Maritime Criminal Market Disruption approach that targets the complete criminal value chain rather than isolated criminal acts. This requires integrating maritime intelligence with financial intelligence, customs enforcement, anti-corruption investigations, cybercrime capabilities and beneficial ownership transparency to identify the individuals, businesses and financial networks that coordinate and profit from maritime crime. Strengthening collaboration among the Eastern Africa Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation (EAPCCO), the Eastern and Southern Africa Anti-Money Laundering Group (ESAAMLG), Financial Intelligence Units and prosecutorial authorities would significantly enhance the



region's ability to trace illicit financial flows, recover criminal assets and dismantle transnational criminal enterprises.

The growing digitisation of organized crime further reinforces the need to modernise counter-piracy strategies. Criminal networks increasingly exploit encrypted communications, digital financial platforms, fraudulent shipping documentation and emerging technologies to coordinate operations while evading traditional law enforcement. Building regional capabilities in digital forensics, financial intelligence, data analytics and intelligence-led investigations will therefore become as critical as strengthening maritime patrols. Integrating these capabilities into broader organized crime strategies would enable governments to anticipate criminal adaptation rather than merely react to maritime incidents.

The future of maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean will ultimately depend on disrupting the economic incentives that sustain organized crime. Such a shift would move regional policy beyond tactical counter-piracy operations towards a more comprehensive strategy that addresses the evolving political economy of maritime insecurity and builds lasting regional resilience.

Friday 7th August 2026

Integrated Ocean Governance Is Crucial to Combatting Piracy in the Western Indian Ocean

Fragmented ocean governance has become one of the greatest strategic vulnerabilities facing the Western Indian Ocean. As maritime trade expands, the Blue Economy grows and geopolitical competition intensifies across the Indo-Pacific, the region's security increasingly depends not only on protecting sea lanes but also on governing marine spaces more effectively. The resurgence of piracy demonstrates that military interventions alone cannot deliver lasting maritime security when institutions responsible for maritime security, fisheries, environmental protection, ports and coastal development continue to operate in isolation. Sustainable maritime security therefore requires a transition from sector-based governance to an integrated ocean governance.

Although regional initiatives such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct have significantly improved maritime cooperation, uneven implementation, fragmented institutional mandates and inconsistent legal frameworks continue to constrain their effectiveness. These governance gaps create opportunities for piracy, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing, trafficking and other forms of transnational maritime crime to converge and reinforce one another.

Eastern African states should adopt an integrated governance framework that aligns maritime security agencies, fisheries authorities, port administrations, environmental regulators, customs agencies and Blue Economy institutions around shared strategic objectives. Priorities should include harmonising maritime legislation, strengthening investigative and prosecutorial capacities, institutionalising intelligence sharing, improving Maritime Domain Awareness, combating corruption and establishing robust monitoring, evaluation and accountability mechanisms. Digital technologies, including integrated maritime information platforms, satellite-based monitoring and data-driven maritime risk assessments, should further strengthen evidence-based policymaking and operational coordination.

A common Eastern Africa Maritime Strategy would provide the institutional anchor for this transformation. Beyond improving policy coherence, such a strategy would establish shared regional priorities, strengthen collective bargaining power in global maritime governance, coordinate investment in maritime infrastructure and innovation, and promote common standards for sustainable ocean management. By aligning national maritime policies with regional ambitions, Eastern Africa can reduce institutional fragmentation while enhancing strategic autonomy and resilience.

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