

Drones, Rebels and Bombs: Explaining the Role of Private Security and Expertise in a Post-piratical Indian Ocean

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Abstract : The last successful hijacking perpetrated by Somali pirates in 2012 represented a critical turning point for the identity and brand of Indian Ocean (IO) insecurity, coined in this paper as the era of the post-piratical. This paper explores the broadening of the PMSC business model to account and contribute to the design of a new IO security environment that prioritises foreign and insurgency drone activity and Houthi rebel operations as the main threat to merchant shipping in the post-2012 era. This study is situated within a longer history of analysing maritime insecurity and also contributes a bespoke conceptual framework that understands the sea as a space that is produced and reproduced relative to existing and emerging threats to merchant shipping based on bespoke models of information sharing and intelligence acquisition. This paper also makes a prominent empirical contribution by drawing on a post-positivist methodology, data drawn from original semi-structured interviews with senior maritime insurers and active merchant seafarers that is triangulated with industry-produced guidance such as the BMP series as primary data sources. Each set is analysed through qualitative discourse and content analysis and supported by the quantitative data sets provided by the IMB Piracy Reporting center and intelligence networks. This analysis reveals that mechanisms such as the IGP&I Maritime Security Committee and intelligence divisions of PMSC's have driven the exchanges of knowledge between land and sea and thus the reproduction of the maritime security environment through new regulations and guidance to account drones, rebels and bombs as the key challenges in the IO, beyond piracy. A contribution of this paper is the argument that experts who may not be in the highest-profile jobs are the architects of maritime insecurity based on their detailed knowledge and connections to vessels in transit. This paper shares the original insights of those who have served in critical decision making spaces to demonstrate that the development and refinement of industry produced deterrence guidance that has been accredited to the mitigation of piracy, have shaped new editions such as BMP 5 that now serve to frame a new security environment that prioritises the mitigation of risks from drones and WBEID's from both state and insurgency risk groups. By highlighting the experiences and perspectives of key players on both land and at sea, the key finding of this paper is outlining that as pirates experienced a financial boom by profiteering from their bespoke business model during the peak of successful hijackings, the private security market encountered a similar level of financial success and guaranteed risk environment in which to prospect business. Thus, the reproduction of the Indian Ocean as a maritime security environment reflects a new found purpose for PMSC's as part of the broader conglomerate of maritime insurers, regulators, shipowners and managers who continue to redirect the security consciousness and IO brand of insecurity.

Keywords : maritime security, private security, risk intelligence, political geography, international relations, political economy, maritime law, security studies

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