

Introductory Remarks

on

A Timely Evaluation of IOR-ARC

by

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at

Indian Council of World Affairs,
Sapru House, New Delhi
May 5-6, 2011

Your Excellencies – Sri Manbir Singh and Ambassador Morteza Sarmadi; Ambassador Sudhir T. Devare; Distinguished Guests; Colleagues, Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Indian Ocean Research Group (IORG) Inc, I would like first of all to express my deep appreciation to the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), and especially to Ambassador Devare and to Vijay Sakhuja and his organising committee for arranging to bring us all together here at Sapru House in New Delhi to discuss such an important issue at such an opportune time.

The need to reinvigorate the Indian Ocean Rim-Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC) has never been more urgent. Under India's leadership, and with the strong support of Australia and the other 16 member states, I have no doubt at all that such a reinvigoration can take place. However, to ensure its success requires, above all, a clear collective and sustainable sense of vision, a stronger degree of cooperation, bureaucratic determination, political will, and, of course, resources. In particular, there is a need for senior regional diplomats to break the vicious circle of neglect and to ensure that a reinvigorated IOR-ARC becomes and remains committed to meaningful regional outcomes.

Overall, it is clear that, following the collapse of Cold War bipolarity, regionalism has become increasingly important in world politics, especially in the context of economic globalisation. Not surprisingly, since the end of the Cold War, there has been a resurgence of interest in regionalism among policy-makers, business people, academics and others. In many parts of the world, opportunities afforded by the end of the Cold War have resulted in a significant increase in regional institutionalisation.

The resultant proliferation in the number of regional groupings has led to a widespread debate over the causes and effects of regionalism, the particular functions it performs, and the ingredients that are required to assure successful regional outcomes. A critical analysis of the factors which contribute to the success or the failure of regional groupings is especially pertinent in the case of IOR-ARC since it will enable the reinvigoration of what is a unique Indian Ocean brand of *maritime regionalism*.

As far as IOR-ARC is concerned, it is probably fair to say that no regional politician, bureaucrat, businessperson, academic, or, indeed, anyone else, would seriously argue that this regional grouping has been a resounding success. In fact, it is likely that there are few inhabitants of the Indian Ocean Region, including most Australians, who *have ever even heard of* the IOR-ARC acronym. In truth, therefore, after 14 years of its existence, IOR-ARC *still* remains a concept. Yet this is surprising, given the increasing geopolitical importance of the Indian Ocean Region.

A strategic reassessment of the significance of the Indian Ocean has been ongoing both within and outside of the Region. For example, the 2009 Australian *Defence White Paper* has stated that the Indian Ocean will possess a much greater geostrategic significance over the next 20 years and will become much more important in Australian maritime strategy and defence planning. In his recent book, *Monsoon: The Indian Ocean and the Future of American Power* (2010), Robert Kaplan has also stressed the significance of the Indian Ocean to the future maintenance of US power.

In this changing geostrategic environment, the challenges facing IOR-ARC are considerable, and India's leadership role in its reinvigoration will be crucial. In order for a comprehensive reform process to be properly implemented, a number of key questions need to be confronted, including:

1. What is regionalism? What are its benefits? How do we go about constructing a successful regionalism?
2. How successful has IOR-ARC been from the perspective of member states and dialogue partners?
3. What is/what should be the main purpose of IOR-ARC?
4. Should the agenda of IOR-ARC become much broader?
5. If the agenda is to broaden, then which issues are to be "off limits" and which topics are to be "on limits"?
6. What of IOR-ARC membership? What role should the dialogue partners take? Should both change and how?
7. What function should the three second track groups (that is, business, tourism and academic) perform? How can these groups be strengthened?

8. What about the organisational structure of IOR-ARC? For example, should the nature and role of the Secretariat be enhanced and how?

I am sure that we all look forward very much indeed to considering these and many other important questions over the next two days. Once again, I congratulate ICWA for taking on this timely challenge and eagerly await the deliberations.

Thank you.