The Indian Ocean is arguably the world’s least understood region in international relations. Furthermore, the oceanic realm has been ignored for too long by Indian Ocean countries. The implementation of international maritime regimes could provide the waterway for regional cooperation and strengthen ocean governance in the Indian Ocean region.

This book is unique. Few contemporary works offer a close look at Indian Ocean maritime affairs. Even fewer works combine three distinct concepts—regimes, regions and ocean governance—in examining prospects for regional cooperation. This book is possibly the first systematic and interdisciplinary attempt at drawing together leading theories of regionalism, integrated management of maritime affairs and regime effectiveness, and in so doing transcending the fields of international maritime law, political science, international relations and international regimes.

This book seeks to make a modest contribution to the study of the Indian Ocean region, offering a comprehensive exposition of maritime regimes for regional cooperation. The aim is to try narrowing the gap in our understanding about the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean as a region in contemporary world geopolitics and international relations. This places the study in the genre of area studies that emphasise regions, regional orders and regional cooperation.

A rubric model of regime effectiveness constructed from a synthesis of regime theory and structuration theory is used to test effectiveness of two fundamentally important maritime regimes for the Indian Ocean region. The model avoids both overemphasising the role of structure and underestimating the power of actors in regime building. The creative approach has potential for further development and its application in measuring effectiveness of other international regimes.

The regime for marine scientific research and the maritime safety regime of port state control were investigated for cooperation in areas of common interests to assess the prospects for broader regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The case studies show that the groundwork for regional cooperation in the maritime realm has been laid by Indian Ocean countries. At present, though, for these maritime regimes to be effective, the Indian Ocean must be considered as “one-ocean, one-region,” for which there is insufficient political leadership amongst rim countries.

Researching the regimes for the Indian Ocean region has not been without its challenges. The Indian Ocean as a region occupies little scholarly attention.
The state of information is dismal and publicly available government data of most countries is scant. Travelling to rim countries was constrained by resources and the inability to initiate contact with government agencies.

The analysis and interpretation has relied on collating firsthand data from annual reports and international agencies. The ideas have developed over nearly a decade of policy work in maritime affairs. The study has benefited immensely from the interaction with numerous subject experts at different forums and individual meetings in Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Brussels. The discussion in Brussels was particularly useful in conceptualising the model for measuring regime effectiveness and learning more about global governance, regionalism and the inter-regional dimension.

This unique exercise attempts to overcome the cynicism associated with looking at the Indian Ocean as a region to argue that international maritime regimes could potentially build regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean for a new geopolitical region to emerge in the geostrategic maritime realm. In a sense the book develops its own distinctive perspective on maritime regimes for ocean governance in the Indian Ocean region—a new regional order.

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