

REPOA Brief

Maritime Security as a Foundation for Tanzania's Blue Economy and National Resilience

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Key Messages

1 Maritime security is a strategic public good that underpins Tanzania's Blue Economy, food security, sovereign authority, and national resilience.

2 Fragmented institutions and weak coordination reduce the effectiveness of maritime security efforts, allowing illegal fishing, trafficking, and other crimes to erode development gains.

3 Without stronger maritime domain awareness and credible enforcement, the expansion of ports, fisheries, and offshore activities risks outpacing the state's ability to protect economic assets.

Introduction

Maritime security has become a central concern in Tanzania's national development and security discourse as the country advances its Blue Economy agenda and seeks to reinforce sovereignty over its extensive maritime domain. With more than 1,400 kilometres of coastline, expansive territorial waters, a large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and strategically located ports serving both national and land linked regional markets, Tanzania's seas and inland waters are core to economic growth, trade facilitation, food security, employment creation, and national stability (URT, 2024b; URT, 2024c).

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is among the world's most dynamic maritime corridors, carrying significant proportions of global trade and energy flows. At the same time, it is characterised by increasingly complex and overlapping risks. Traditional threats such as piracy coexist with non traditional challenges, including illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, maritime based trafficking, environmental degradation, contested maritime boundaries, and climate induced stress on marine ecosystems (UNODC, 2022a). These risks blur the boundary between development and security, making maritime security a prerequisite for a viable Blue Economy rather than a constraint upon it.

Within this context, maritime security is no longer understood narrowly as a naval or law enforcement function. It is increasingly recognised as a **strategic public good** that enables economic sovereignty, protects state authority at sea, secures national revenues, and sustains long term development outcomes (Bueger, 2015). Weak maritime governance allows economic value to leak from national systems, undermines investor confidence, depletes marine resources, and erodes social cohesion in coastal and lacustrine communities. Conversely, effective maritime security strengthens compliance, deters illicit activity, and reinforces Tanzania's credibility as a stable and predictable maritime partner in the region.

Tanzania has taken important steps to strengthen maritime security, including investments in naval and marine policing capacity, port facility security aligned with the International Ship Facility

Security (ISPS) Code, participation in regional cooperation mechanisms, ratification of relevant international instruments, and the establishment of the National Joint Operations Centre (NJOC) as a platform for inter agency coordination (IMO, 2023; UNODC, 2024). However, this brief argues that outcomes remain constrained less by policy neglect than **by systemic governance gaps**. Fragmented institutional mandates, uneven Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), weak enforcement to prosecution linkages, and partial integration of security considerations into Blue Economy planning continue to limit effectiveness, particularly offshore.

As Blue Economy activities expand across ports, fisheries, offshore energy, maritime transport, and tourism, the costs of these gaps are likely to intensify. Addressing them is essential if Tanzania's maritime spaces are to function as productive assets rather than vectors of strategic vulnerability.

Methodology and Data

Maritime security has become a central concern in Tanzania's national development and security discourse as the country advances its Blue Economy agenda and seeks to reinforce sovereignty over its extensive maritime domain. With more than 1,400 kilometres of coastline, expansive territorial waters, a large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), and strategically located ports serving both national and land linked regional markets, Tanzania's seas and inland waters are core to economic growth, trade facilitation, food security, employment creation, and national stability (URT, 2024b; URT, 2024c).

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Findings

Maritime security plays a central enabling role in Tanzania's Blue Economy. Secure sea lanes, regulated fisheries, and protected port infrastructure support trade efficiency, fiscal mobilisation, employment creation, and investor confidence (URT, 2024b). Where maritime insecurity persists, the economic costs extend beyond direct losses from crime to include higher insurance premiums, distorted markets, reduced competitiveness of ports, and declining resource sustainability.

IUU fishing emerges as the most pervasive and structurally damaging maritime security challenge. It erodes fish stocks, reduces public revenue, undermines artisanal livelihoods, and weakens incentives for legal compliance (Nombo, 2020). Despite improvements in vessel monitoring systems, patrols, community based fisheries management, and port state measures, enforcement capacity remains constrained relative to the scale of Tanzania's EEZ, particularly in offshore waters.

Piracy and armed robbery at sea are contained but remains persistent risks. While Tanzania has avoided large scale piracy incidents, spillover effects from the wider WIO impose indirect economic and reputational costs through freight charges, insurance premiums, and routing decisions (Rwechungura, 2023). Armed robbery in ports and anchorages poses growing near shore risks as maritime traffic increases.

Maritime based organised crime, including drug trafficking, human trafficking, wildlife smuggling, and weapons movement, represents a growing and often under appreciated threat. These activities exploit weaknesses in port controls, information sharing, and regulatory oversight, gradually eroding institutional integrity and public trust (Ullman, 2016).

Institutionally, Tanzania's maritime security architecture is pluralistic but fragmented. Responsibilities are distributed across the defence forces, marine police, fisheries authorities, port operators, customs, immigration services, and regulators. While mechanisms such as the NJOC represent an important step toward coordination, information flows remain uneven, mandates overlap, and accountability is diffuse (UNODC, 2024).

Maritime Domain Awareness remains uneven, particularly offshore. Surveillance, fisheries data, port intelligence, and enforcement information are not yet fully integrated into a unified national maritime picture, constraining early warning and strategic targeting (Bueger, 2015).

Conclusion and recommendations

Maritime security in Tanzania should be understood as an enabling condition for economic development rather than a sectoral or episodic concern. As Blue Economy activities intensify, weak coordination and limited awareness risk turning growth opportunities into strategic vulnerabilities. Although Tanzania possesses robust legal frameworks and growing operational capacity, impact is constrained by fragmented governance and uneven institutional alignment.

Strengthening maritime security, particularly against IUU fishing and transnational crime offers high returns by protecting livelihoods, safeguarding revenues, reinforcing sovereignty, and sustaining long term Blue Economy value. The core challenge lies not in recognition, but in translating ambition into coherent, system wide action.

Strengthening maritime security in Tanzania requires a shift from fragmented, asset driven interventions toward a more coherent, system centred approach that aligns institutions, information, incentives, and accountability. Five recommendations are made to achieve this shift:

First, to consolidate and strengthen the national coordination authority. While Tanzania has established important coordination platforms, most notably the National Joint Operations Centre, their effectiveness will depend on clearer legal mandates, predictable financing, and formalised reporting lines. Empowering coordination mechanisms to require information sharing, joint

planning, and prioritisation across defence, law enforcement, regulatory, and revenue agencies would significantly enhance collective impact without undermining sectoral mandates.

Second, at the operational level, greater emphasis should be placed on building integrated Maritime Domain Awareness as the foundation of effective enforcement. Rather than prioritising additional patrol assets alone, policy should focus on integrating surveillance systems, vessel monitoring data, port intelligence, fisheries records, and enforcement information into a unified national maritime picture. Improved awareness would multiply the effectiveness of existing capabilities, enable earlier detection of illegal activity, and support intelligence led decision making across agencies.

Third, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing should be elevated explicitly as a top tier national security concern. Addressing it effectively requires embedding fisheries protection within the broader maritime security architecture, including offshore monitoring, port state and market controls, and stronger links between interdiction, investigation, and prosecution. Treating IUU fishing as a strategic threat rather than a sectoral compliance issue would better reflect its economic, social, and sovereignty implications.

Fourth, equally critical is strengthening the enforcement to prosecution chain. Maritime security efforts cannot deliver deterrence if detected violations do not result in timely and proportionate legal consequences. Investments in investigative capacity, evidence management, prosecutorial coordination, and judicial specialisation in maritime crime are therefore essential complements to operational enforcement.

Fifth, maritime security considerations should be systematically mainstreamed into Blue Economy planning and investment decisions. Major port expansions, fisheries development initiatives, offshore projects, and maritime tourism investments should be subject to early risk assessment to ensure that economic growth does not generate unmanaged exposure. This integrated approach, reinforced through regional cooperation and preventive maritime diplomacy, would allow Tanzania to secure its maritime spaces while maximising their contribution to long term, inclusive national development.

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