

7th IONS Conclave of Chiefs
Paris, November 2021

The 7th Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs (CoC) was held on 15 and 16 November 2021 in Paris, following on from the 7th IONS Seminar hosted by France in La Reunion (28 June-1 July 2021). The CoC and Seminar were held separately because international travel restrictions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic at the time had precluded the attendance of many delegations in person at the la Reunion event.

22 official delegations attended the 7th CoC, including 11 current and appointed Navy Chiefs and 3 Deputy Chiefs of Navy. Additionally a livestreaming link was established to enable those Chiefs of Navy who were unable to attend in person to witness the proceedings remotely.

As announced by the current IONS Chair, Admiral Pierre Vandier, Chief of the French Navy, at the Seminar mid-year, a preliminary planning meeting of the members' senior staff officers was conducted on the morning of 15 November. Because the last CoC was hosted by Iran in 2018, and the most recent IONS Planning Workshop (IPW 2019) had been hosted by Oman more than two years before this 7th CoC, both of course also before the COVID-19 pandemic, inevitably a few of the various Resolutions had become time-expired or had been overtaken by events. To ensure that the consideration of the assembled Conclave was not wasted towards out of date issues, this preliminary planning meeting reviewed the status of all Resolutions from Tehran and Muscat to ensure that the agenda put to the Chiefs was as contemporary as possible.

The Conclave began that afternoon with a welcome message from Ms Florence Parly, French Minister of the Armed Forces, in which she highlighted:

- our common objective to maintain the Indian Ocean as an area of peace and stability and as an area of prosperity;
- Indian Ocean States are fortunate to have a forum where Navy chiefs can exchange and cooperate;
- France's support for the development of European Union projects, both for the benefit of, and in collaboration with, the Indian Ocean States; and
- France is fully aware of the honour bestowed on the French Navy vide the Chairmanship of IONS and is determined to approach these two years with dynamism and humility.

Admiral Vandier also personally welcomed all delegations to the 7th IONS CoC in Paris. During his opening address he:

- thanked the Indian Navy for the genesis and founding of the IONS in 2008, which is now an essential tool to cooperate in the complex geopolitical environment of the Indian Ocean. He also thanked the Chiefs of Navies who have assumed the Chairmanship since 2008;
- emphasised his commitment to maintain and develop the dynamism of IONS;
- underlined the logic and benefit of addressing the challenge of environmental security within each of the IONS Working Groups (IWG): Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief (HADR), Maritime Security (MarSec) and Information Sharing and Interoperability (IS&I).

Relevant and positive discussions over the two day period led to agreed conclusions on the various issues under CoC consideration; notably the active resolutions of the CoC 2018, the IPW 2019 and the three IWG.

These included: the orientation of the work programmes of the three IWG, the selection of the co-chairs for each, the review and testing of the various proposed tactical documents at sea during IONS exercises. Also agreed were the establishment of a work plan for all of the IONS nations going forward, including, among other things, an update of the IONS governance and reference documentation, a reflection on potential improvements to IONS communication methods and the plan to establish a formal relationship with a similar international organisation, the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS).

Two IONS Maritime Exercises (IMEX) were announced: one to be managed by the Iranian Navy, with the theme of Maritime Security (between the end of 2021 and the beginning of 2022) and the other, an HADR IMEX, by the French Navy, in collaboration with the Indian Navy, at the end of March 2022 off the western Indian coast.

In the margins of the Conclave, Rear-Admiral Ehle (EEAS/EU) highlighted the European Union's involvement in the wake of the adoption of the Indo-European Strategy for the Indo-Pacific. In addition, the French Ambassador for Poles and Maritime Issues, Mr Olivier Poivre d'Arvor, placed the conclave in the context of France's strong commitment to the oceans.

Finally, the Conclave endorsed the nomination of the Royal Thai Navy as the next IONS Chair (2023/2025) and confirmed that India will host the next IPW in 2022.

In his closing remarks following a very successful 7th CoC, the Chair emphasised the following points:

- the very clear benefit of this forum, which enables navies to exchange beyond any possible political divergence;
- his satisfaction in regards to all the decisions which had been taken, in particular on the exercises, the tactical documentation, the IONS Website and the integration of environmental security across all IWG activity;
- the great opportunity offered by this Conclave to achieve fruitful discussions with the Chiefs of Navies and Heads of Delegations;
- his specific thanks to the Royal Thai Navy for the commitment to assume the next Chairmanship and a confirmation of his full support to Thailand in related preparations;
- finally, the Chair advised that he would seize every opportunity to visit the Indian Ocean region in order to prolong the discussions he had during these two days with IONS Chiefs.