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Critical analysis of political aspects of international maritime security: psychology and decision-making logic

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Problem relevance. Maritime security remains one of the most pressing issues in contemporary global politics due to growing geopolitical competition in maritime spaces, emergence of new technological threats (cyber threats, hybrid threats), and the necessity to reconsider existing mechanisms of international cooperation. The absence of international consensus regarding the definition of maritime security complicates the formation of effective political decisions in this sphere.

Research objective. To conduct a critical analysis of political aspects of international maritime security through investigating the logic of decision-making by state and international actors, as well as to develop recommendations for improving political analysis processes in this sphere.

Research methods. The methodological foundation consists of G. Allison's decision-making models (rational actor, organizational process, and governmental politics) for analyzing the logic of political decisions, comparative analysis for comparing different states' approaches, case study method for investigating specific examples (Regional Maritime Security Architecture in the Western Indian Ocean), and critical analysis for assessing political decision effectiveness according to criteria of correspondence to set goals, consideration of all stakeholders' interests, and adaptability to new challenges.

Research results. It was established that maritime security strategy formation occurs under the influence of a complex of interconnected political factors, including geopolitical, economic, and institutional elements. It was revealed that decision-making in maritime security sphere does not always correspond to the rational choice model, confirming the importance of considering organizational processes and governmental politics. The necessity of applying critical thinking for effective analysis of political decisions regarding maritime security was proven. Fundamental contradictions between principles of national sovereignty and collective security needs were identified. Higher effectiveness of regional cooperation mechanisms compared to global institutions was demonstrated using the successful functioning of RMSA as an example. A five-component model for critical analysis of political decisions in maritime security sphere was developed.

Key words: international maritime security, political aspects, decision-making logic, decision-making psychology, critical thinking, political science, international relations, maritime policy, geopolitics, security challenges.

Introduction. International maritime security remains one of the most pressing issues in contemporary global politics. Maritime security has emerged as one of the most relevant concepts in international relations, drawing attention to new challenges and mobilising support for their resolution. However, no international consensus has been achieved regarding the definition of maritime security, which is complicated by the absence of a clear foundational distinction between maritime security and maritime safety [5].

Maritime security is characterised by four fundamental features: interconnectedness, transnationality, liminality (in the sense of involving both land and sea), and national and institutional inter-jurisdictionality [6]. Maritime security serves as an umbrella term used to classify issues in the maritime sphere that are often related to national security, the marine environment, economic development, and human security. This encompasses global oceans as well as regional seas,

territorial waters, rivers, and ports, where seas function as a “stage for geopolitical projection of power, interstate warfare, or militarised disputes” [13].

The importance of oceans in international politics continues to grow daily. The 21st century represents the century of oceans, when international political structures undergo profound transformations. Disputes concerning territorial sovereignty and maritime boundary delimitation are becoming increasingly acute, affecting relations between states. At the regional level, cooperation and competition in maritime affairs coexist, closely linked to regional peace and stability [12].

Contemporary challenges to maritime security demand that political leaders and experts apply critical thinking and logical analysis in decision-making processes. Researchers emphasise that the increasing severity and heterogeneity of threats to maritime security in terms of actors (criminal, non-state, and state) and activities (crime, hybrid threats, and military

attacks) do not necessarily make oceans more dangerous. Still, maritime risks and threats become less predictable and more complex to suppress.

The problem is complicated by the fact that maritime security has a transnational character and requires coordination of efforts among different states with their often conflicting national interests. The shift from “simple” criminality to heavily armed militias and state participation in “grey zone” conflicts demonstrates how maritime insecurity is closely connected to issues of proper governance and political conditions on land, when state and state-like entities increasingly become perpetrators [11].

The relevance of this research is conditioned by the growing significance of maritime spaces in geopolitical competition, the emergence of new technological threats, and the necessity to reconsider existing mechanisms of international cooperation in the sphere of maritime security.

Main studies and publications. The problem of international maritime security is actively researched in contemporary political science and international relations theory. According to research, until the early 1990s, the term “maritime security” was practically unused. However, various aspects of maritime security, such as piracy, maritime smuggling, and maritime border disputes, attracted the interest of many people both theoretically and practically [10].

A significant contribution to maritime security research has been made by Christian Bueger, who actively investigated maritime security issues with an ontological approach, focusing on the concept of “threats” in the maritime environment. Bueger attributes high value to maritime security regarding political goals and ideology, making naval security a keyword that allows for assessing the significance and conflicts of opinions surrounding the subject. Keywords enable international coordination of actions in the absence of consensus [5].

The geopolitical dimension of maritime security has long been neglected by researchers, despite the growing number of studies devoted to various aspects of maritime security. Research results indicate that the goals and interests of maritime security for states and international institutions directly and indirectly depend on geographical and geopolitical considerations. However, this connection is only tacitly acknowledged in official documents [8].

The logic of decision-making in the security sphere became the subject of research by Graham Allison, who in his work “Essence of Decision” proposed three models for analysing political decisions [1]. The rational actor model presumes that state actions are analysed based on the assumption that nations consider all options and act rationally to maximise their advantages. Under this perspective, state actions are analyzed by assuming that nations consider all possibilities and act rationally to maximise their utility.

Central to the liberal approach in international relations regarding maritime security is the regulation of the marine sphere. Some legal scholars have defined maritime security as “a stable order of oceans, subordinated to the rule of law at sea” [13]. The liberal approach emphasises that international law has been a means of transforming the traditional way of projecting state power at sea through their naval forces toward cooperation for achieving common goals.

Constructivism is based on the notion that security is a socially constructed concept. Instead of perceiving maritime security as a given list of threats and means, the constructivist school of thought is interested in examining relationships and how the idea of marine security emerges through actions, interactions, and perceptions.

Interstate disputes constitute a fundamental dimension of maritime security and can be described as hostile and conflictual relations between two or more states. Interstate disputes arise through strategic competition for access and the ability to “use seas for commercial and military purposes or prevent others from doing so”. A current example of interstate dispute is the rivalry between the USA, India, and China in the Western Indian Ocean [13].

Recent studies demonstrate that multilateral maritime exercises (Multilateral Maritime Event – MME) play an essential role in implementing grand strategy in three regions – Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region [7]. The central assumption is that when the perception of strategic threat by American policymakers and military leaders increases, the purpose, quantity, and participants of MME change.

Contemporary researchers emphasise that maritime security is an essential component of national security, and adequate provision of maritime security requires full guarantee from domestic law. International relations scholars assert that the idea of marine security should guide the construction of the legal system of maritime security [12].

Despite the significant amount of research, questions regarding the integration of critical thinking and logical analysis into the process of making political decisions concerning maritime security remain insufficiently studied. The problem of harmonising the national interests of different states in the sphere of maritime security and developing effective mechanisms of international cooperation also requires further investigation.

Research Objectives. This article aims to conduct a critical analysis of the political aspects of international maritime security through investigating the logic of decision-making by state and international actors, as well as to develop recommendations for improving political analysis processes in this sphere.

To achieve this goal, the following tasks are set: to analyse the main political factors influencing the formation of maritime security strategies; to investigate

logical models of decision-making in the sphere of international maritime security; to assess the role of critical thinking in analysing political decisions concerning maritime security; to identify main contradictions in different states' political approaches to maritime security; to propose recommendations for improving political analysis in the sphere of maritime security.

Research Methods. The methodological foundation of this research consists of G. Allison's decision-making models for analysing the logic of political decisions, comparative analysis for comparing different states' approaches, case study method for investigating specific examples, and critical analysis for assessing the effectiveness of political choices. The evaluation of political decision effectiveness was conducted according to criteria of correspondence to set goals, consideration of all stakeholders' interests, adaptability to new challenges, and sustainability of results.

Discussion. The formation of international maritime security strategies occurs under the influence of a complex of political factors. The geopolitical dimension of marine security is characterised by the fact that maritime security goals and interests of states and international institutions directly and indirectly depend on geographical and geopolitical considerations.

Maritime potential preserves not only economic potential but also other potentials – from ecological, geopolitical, geostrategic to the potential for international conflicts, making naval security extraordinarily important for all countries worldwide. Maritime security issues in the peace era have become a subject of concern, as how a country adopts and regulates policies related to borders and activities in the waters of their respective countries will undoubtedly be highly regarded in international politics.

Institutional factors are related to state participation in international organisations and maritime security agreements. As researchers note, regional agreements between governments are usually necessary to define maritime security, or proper order at sea, for the corresponding region. Governments in West Africa, Southeast Asia, Europe, or other areas may have different priorities, “but this is their order, defined in negotiations and accordance with international law” [13].

Domestic political factors also play an essential role. Research demonstrates that the complexity of the political decision-making process in the sphere of maritime security is often conditioned by the dominance of political factors and internal bureaucratic problems [6]. The absence of priority narratives in the marine and development sectors means that government priorities are more oriented toward infrastructural aspects at the expense of other fundamental elements.

The analysis of decision-making processes in the sphere of international maritime security is based on Graham Allison's classic work “Essence of Decision”, which proposed three conceptual models for understanding decision-making in crises.

The Rational Actor Model (RAM or Model I) represents the dominant conceptual framework used by foreign affairs analysts to simplify complex processes. In a rapid decision-making environment, theories with practical applicability can be helpful and necessary. RAM is used to explain and predict behaviour by identifying a specific strategic goal of the nation-state and considering which actions pursue this goal [1].

In this model, action in foreign affairs is understood as a deliberate choice made by a unified national government to maximise strategic objectives. Governmental action is a product of choice, and decisions can be explained by telling about goals and “calculations” – rational assessment of options – since rational actors strive for consistent, value-maximising outcomes based on defined constraints.

The rational actor model is attractive primarily because behaviour can be explained entirely in terms of the goals being pursued. However, Allison and Zelikow argue that the model can also be powerfully deceptive, as much of the proper explanation of outcomes is inherent in assumptions and evidence beyond rationality [2].

The rational approach allows representing preferences as utility functions with real values. Economic decision-making becomes a problem of maximising this utility function, considering constraints (for example, budget). This has many advantages: it provides a compact theory that makes empirical predictions with a relatively sparse model, only a description of the agent's goals and constraints.

The Organisational Behaviour Model recognises that governments are not monoliths but “vast conglomerates of loosely allied organisations, each with substantial independent existence” [2]. The organisational process model is based on organisational theory to emphasise the influence of institutional cultures and standard procedures within governmental bureaucracy.

While RAM assumes that behaviour is a deliberate choice, Model II considers behaviour as the result of organisational procedures designed to maximise efficiency. Through this lens, analysts can identify tendencies of a specific organisation to understand its procedures and form predictions.

Organisations operate according to strict, pre-established procedures that produce the desired result [4]. The state is still essentially a unitary actor, but the analogy is now a quarterback rather than a chess player. Just as a quarterback calls certain (pre-planned) plays, the government can only dictate policy options that already exist in standard operating procedures.

The Governmental Politics Model completely abandons the idea of a “unitary” government. In this model, “where you stand depends on where you sit”. Those responsible for different state duties (Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence, etc.) advance predictable arguments based on their current position [2].

Government decisions and actions are essentially intranational political results: results in the sense that what happens is not chosen as a solution to a problem, but rather is the result of compromise, coalition, competition, and confusion among government officials who see different facets of the problem; political in the sense that the activity from which results emerge is best characterised as bargaining.

Political “results” are the outcome of negotiations among these leaders. Applying to the Cuban Crisis, the governmental politics model well explains some actions and demonstrates that compromises are often achieved during governmental decision-making processes [3].

The contemporary system of international maritime security faces a complex of new challenges requiring revision of traditional approaches.

Cyber threats to maritime security have become one of the most serious problems of modernity. The importance of adopting a balanced approach that considers both advantages and risks of technological achievements is emphasised by researchers, as well as the necessity for reliable governance frameworks and international cooperation to ensure responsible and ethical use of technologies in maritime security.

A vivid example is the NotPetya cyberattack in 2017, which affected several major organisations, including maritime giant Maersk. This ransomware attack disrupted global shipping operations, leading to significant logistical chaos and financial losses. The impact of the attack on Maersk alone, which included paralysis of port operations and the necessity for complete IT system renewal, serves as a sobering example of modern maritime infrastructure vulnerability [9].

Hybrid threats deserve special attention. The maritime sphere plays a significant role in such processes: the open sea, unlike sovereign territories on land, represents “legally neutral” spaces [11]. This allows creating strong political, economic, and cultural messages to the world through violent means, but without violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any state. In other words, this represents relatively low-risk, high-gain efforts that do not reach the level of war.

This trend has several consequences. First, it intensifies threat patterns at sea compared to the modus operandi of maritime criminality observed previously. Second, since new threat patterns include not only criminal organisations but also political groups and states, there is a risk of weakening existing cooperation platforms and fragmenting robust solutions to maritime insecurity.

Pollution and exploitation of marine resources threaten ocean biodiversity, affect sustainable implementation of SDG 14 regarding life below water, fulfilment of the recent High Seas Treaty, and realisation of the AEC Strategic Plan 2026–2030 and the blue economy agenda. While this is guided by security policy, it is necessary to realise that there is a risk of securitisation of the maritime sphere with its focus on criminal and militarised threats at sea [11].

An example of successful cooperation is the Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA) in the Western Indian Ocean. The establishment of RMSA was ensured within the Program for the Promotion of Maritime Safety (MASE Programme), funded by the European Union and implemented by the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC). This innovative framework promoted cooperation among a wide range of actors with a shared commitment to securing the maritime sphere. At the operational core of RMSA are two key centres: the Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) in Madagascar and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) in Seychelles. These centres operate as hubs for real-time maritime situational awareness, regional coordination, and rapid response to threats through coordinated naval operations.

The MASE Programme concluded in 2023, and considering the significant results and various successful operations conducted within RMSA, the EU agreed to continue funding within the Safe Seas Africa (SSA) initiative. RMSA is anchored in two main regional agreements focused on information sharing, coordination, and coordinated maritime operations (collectively called MASE agreements).

One of RMSA's most influential contributions is its role in cultivating the soft power of the Western Indian Ocean – the ability to shape maritime governance and diplomacy through legitimacy, cooperation, and strategic vision rather than coercion. This approach aligns with fundamental frameworks such as The 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) and the Lome Declaration, both of which promote African maritime governance and sustainable blue economy development.

Instead of relying on externally imposed models, RMSA represents a turning point toward home-grown solutions rooted in local context, priorities, and political will. It offers African coastal and island states not only a seat at the table but also the ability to convene it.

The active participation of the IOC in high-profile international forums – including SHADE, the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), the 2018 Sustainable Blue Economy Conference organised by Kenya, and annual UN Security Council reports – has further amplified the voices of African coastal and island states in the Western Indian Ocean in global maritime

governance discussions. Acting as RMSA's diplomatic engine, IOC works to build political support for regional maritime centres while promoting dialogue and coordination among a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

The main objectives of RMIFC include processing maritime information to create maritime situational awareness and a comprehensive regional maritime picture, supporting regional maritime operations, serving as a platform for information sharing, promoting cooperation, and contributing to reports and research. The Regional Maritime Security Architecture in the Western Indian Ocean is built on the principle of multilateral cooperation, considering the transnational nature of most maritime threats, multilateral cooperation is critical for successful mitigation.

The application of critical thinking in analysing political decisions regarding maritime security presupposes a systematic evaluation of arguments, evidence, and logical connections. Security studies approaches can shed light on the meaning of maritime security for different actors. Securitisation analysis frameworks allow examining how maritime threats are created and what various political claims they contain to reveal political interests and divergent ideologies.

Security practice theory allows studying what actors do when they claim to enhance maritime security. Together, these frameworks enable mapping maritime security [5].

Contemporary research emphasises the importance of ethical frameworks in evaluating political decisions in maritime security. Ethical frameworks, including proportionality, necessity, transparency, accountability, and human rights, are applied to assess ethical implications of technologies such as unmanned maritime systems, cyber threats, and surveillance capabilities.

Ethical training and education for maritime security personnel in promoting responsible and accountable decision-making is very important. For example, researcher Md Syful Islam proposes including case studies and simulations as effective tools for studying the practical application and effectiveness of ethical training in real scenarios [9].

An essential aspect of critical analysis is considering the role of non-state actors in maritime security. Research demonstrates that non-state actor actions at sea have a direct and contributing influence on how states respond or fail to respond to security problems in international waters. This capability is related to the absence of sovereign control over the high seas. The long-standing doctrine of "freedom of the seas" opens space for conflicts between state-centric security concepts and national interests of states, on one hand, and (human) security, trade, and environmental problems, on the other hand, which non-state actors are well-adapted to fill [6].

The analysis of different states' political approaches to maritime security reveals significant contradictions that complicate international cooperation and reduce the effectiveness of global security mechanisms.

The fundamental contradiction lies between principles of national sovereignty and the need for collective security. The South China Sea is widely recognised as one of the most complex regions in the world due to disputes over territorial sovereignty and maritime boundary delimitation among various coastal states, as well as involvement of states outside the region [12].

The evolution of international maritime order reflects changes in power structures and interests, as well as the transition of global order. Maritime security order is an integral part of the international security order. In recent years, the situation in the South China Sea has become complex and changeable. Due to sovereignty disputes and uncertain resource ownership, the South China Sea has become a contentious zone with significant international security concerns [17].

States demonstrate different approaches to using military force to ensure maritime security. Interstate disputes always have political motivation and concern for state interests. The concept can be divided into three main categories of disputes:

- 1) Functional disputes regarding physical properties and resources at sea
- 2) Institutional disputes regarding territorial borders
- 3) symbolic disputes regarding cultural and political values that states attach to the maritime sphere.

Based on the conducted research, a model for critical analysis of political decisions in the sphere of maritime security is proposed, which includes five main components:

The first component involves context analysis – assessment of geopolitical, economic, and institutional factors based on Allison's models. The second component includes actor identification – determining all stakeholders, including non-state actors and their interests. The third component involves alternative assessment – systematic consideration of possible action options and their consequences, considering ethical principles. The fourth component includes a multilateral approach – consideration of regional cooperation mechanisms and their interaction with global institutions. The fifth component involves results monitoring – systematic tracking of adopted decision effectiveness through maritime information centres.

Conclusions. The conducted research allows drawing several vital conclusions regarding the political aspects of international maritime security and decision-making logic in this sphere.

First, maritime security strategy formation occurs under the influence of a complex of interconnected political factors. The research confirmed that maritime security goals and interests of states and inter-

national institutions directly and indirectly depend on geographical and geopolitical considerations. Maritime potential preserves not only economic potential but also ecological, geopolitical, and geostrategic potential, making naval security extraordinarily important for all countries worldwide.

Second, decision-making in the sphere of maritime security does not always correspond to the rational choice model. Analysis based on Allison's models demonstrated the importance of considering organisational processes and governmental politics when analysing political decisions. The rational actor model remains the dominant conceptual framework, but it can be powerfully deceptive, as much of the proper explanation of outcomes is inherent in assumptions beyond rationality.

Third, critical thinking is a necessary instrument for the practical analysis of political decisions regarding maritime security. Securitisation analysis frameworks allow studying how maritime threats are created and what political claims they contain. Ethical frameworks, including proportionality, necessity, transparency, and accountability, are critically important when evaluating technological solutions in maritime security.

Fourth, contemporary challenges to maritime security require a comprehensive approach. The NotPetya cyberattack on Maersk in 2017 demonstrates the vulnerability of modern maritime infrastructure, while hybrid threats utilise “legally neutral” spaces of the high seas for political purposes [11]. Increasing severity and heterogeneity of threats make maritime risks less predictable and more complex to suppress.

Fifth, regional cooperation mechanisms demonstrate greater effectiveness compared to global institutions. The RMSA experience in the Western Indian Ocean reflects the success of the African approach to maritime security. RMSA represents a turning point toward home-grown solutions rooted in local context, priorities, and political will. The MASE Programme (2010–2023) and its continuation as Safe Seas Africa demonstrate the importance of sustainable international funding for regional initiatives.

Sixth, analysis of contradictions in different states' political approaches revealed fundamental contradictions between principles of national sovereignty and collective security needs. The South China Sea remains one of the most complex regions due to territorial disputes, demonstrating the complexity of harmonising national interests with international security needs.

Seventh, the role of non-state actors in maritime security is growing, confirmed by their direct influence on state reactions in international waters. The doctrine of “freedom of the seas” creates space for conflicts between state-centric approaches and non-state actor interests [6].

Eighth, multilateral maritime exercises play an essential role in implementing maritime security, adapting to changing geopolitical threats. NATO Sea Breeze exercises after the invasion of Ukraine demonstrate the adaptability of these mechanisms to new challenges.

The research results demonstrate that successful provision of international maritime security requires an integrated approach combining elements of all three Allison models: rational planning, consideration of organisational constraints, and management of inter-agency politics. Critical thinking should be applied at all levels of decision-making, from local to global.

Further research should focus on developing more sophisticated tools for integrating ethical principles into maritime security decision-making processes, especially in the context of artificial intelligence and the use of autonomous systems. An important direction is studying the impact of climate change on maritime security, geopolitics and adapting existing cooperation mechanisms to new challenges. Special attention deserves studying possibilities for expanding the RMSA model to other regions and creating a global network of regional maritime security centres.

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Критичний аналіз політичних аспектів міжнародної морської безпеки: психологія та логіка прийняття рішень

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Актуальність проблеми. Морська безпека залишається однією з найбільш актуальних проблем сучасної світової політики у зв'язку з зростанням геополітичної конкуренції в морських просторах, появою нових технологічних загроз (кіберзагрози, гібридні загрози) та необхідністю перегляду існуючих механізмів міжнародного співробітництва. Відсутність міжнародного консенсусу щодо визначення морської безпеки ускладнює формування ефективних політичних рішень у цій сфері.

Мета дослідження. Провести критичний аналіз політичних аспектів міжнародної морської безпеки через дослідження логіки прийняття рішень державними та міжнародними акторами, а також розробити рекомендації щодо вдосконалення процесів політичного аналізу в цій сфері.

Методи дослідження. Методологічну основу дослідження становлять моделі прийняття рішень Г. Еллісона (раціонального актора, організаційного процесу та урядової політики) для аналізу логіки політичних рішень, порівняльний аналіз для зіставлення підходів різних держав, метод кейс-стаді для дослідження конкретних прикладів (Регіональна архітектура морської безпеки в Західній частині Індійського океану (RMSA)), критичний аналіз для оцінки ефективності політичних рішень за критеріями відповідності поставленим цілям, врахування інтересів усіх зацікавлених сторін, адаптивності до нових викликів.

Результати дослідження. Встановлено, що формування стратегій морської безпеки відбувається під впливом комплексу взаємопов'язаних політичних факторів, включаючи геополітичні, економічні та інституційні чинники. Виявлено, що прийняття рішень у сфері морської безпеки не завжди відповідає моделі раціонального вибору, що підтверджує важливість врахування організаційних процесів та урядової політики. Доведено необхідність застосування критичного мислення для ефективного аналізу політичних рішень щодо морської безпеки. Ідентифіковано фундаментальні суперечності між принципами національного суверенітету та потребами колективної безпеки. Продемонстровано вищу ефективність регіональних механізмів співробітництва порівняно з глобальними інституціями на прикладі успішного функціонування RMSA. Запропоновано п'ятикомпонентну модель критичного аналізу політичних рішень у сфері морської безпеки.

Ключові слова: міжнародна морська безпека, політичні аспекти, логіка прийняття рішень, психологія прийняття рішень, критичне мислення, політологія, міжнародні відносини, морська політика, геополітика, виклики безпеки.

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