

A stylized map of the African continent is the central focus of the cover. The map is filled with thick, horizontal brushstrokes in a variety of colors including orange, green, red, teal, brown, and yellow. The edges of the map are irregular and hand-drawn. To the right of the main continent, the island of Madagascar is also depicted with similar brushstrokes.

**REFLECTIONS  
ON THE  
INDO-PACIFIC:  
PERSPECTIVES  
FROM AFRICA**

**Abhishek Mishra**  
Editor

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# Introduction

**T**he Indo-Pacific denotes a vast maritime zone, stretching from the littorals of East Africa and West Asia, across the Indian Ocean and the western Pacific Ocean, to the littorals of East Asia.<sup>1</sup> Some of the world's large commercial trading routes traverse these waters. This vast geographic and strategic expanse, connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans, is increasingly being viewed as a global centre of gravity that engages and is of interest to many countries. Countries like France, Japan, India, the US, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK have developed policies to promote their reach in the region. Although developing international partnerships in the region is not new, the motives to embrace and promote the centrality of the Indo-Pacific in their maritime policies are diverse. While some countries are aiming to balance the competition and shape the maritime architecture in the region, others are developing strategies in response to China's economic, political, and military expansion. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific is emerging as the new and expanded theatre of great-power contestation, with the African continent at the heart of such competition.

In many ways, the Indo-Pacific is a contested concept without much clarity on what falls within or outside the geopolitical space. While the US's concept of the Indo-Pacific excludes Africa,<sup>2</sup> countries like India,<sup>3</sup> France,<sup>4</sup> and Japan<sup>5</sup> acknowledge the centrality of African states within their Indo-Pacific strategies. For some time now, external powers have been scrambling to set up naval and military bases in Africa and align with friendly regimes to protect their investments and safeguard the commercial sea lanes from piracy. As a result, African leaders have continuously voiced apprehensions about getting caught in between great power contestations.<sup>6</sup>

Without clearly defining their national interests and power capabilities and taking direct policy positions on the Indo-Pacific, African countries risk getting marginalised from

the very process and activities that will impact the continent's long-term prosperity and interests.<sup>7</sup> As a result, it is becoming increasingly difficult for African states to remain passive bystanders.

The maritime domain is undoubtedly vital for Africa to achieve peace, security, and development.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, African countries have begun to realise the economic potential of harnessing water bodies and slowly shed their continental outlook.<sup>9</sup> They are now adopting maritime security policies as part of broader national security strategies. However, their ability to exert agency while engaging with external partners has been limited due to capacity and resource constraints. Moreover, each African country's maritime needs and requirements differ. Small African island nations do not necessarily have the same interests or priorities as the littorals in East and West Africa. Therefore, for the African countries to truly reflect their developmental ambitions, they need to exercise collective agency by engaging in different multilateral and unilateral initiatives. Multilateralism matters for small African states as it gives them the best chance to pool resources and ideas to influence global decisions and ensure that their voices are factored in discussions that have a bearing on the continent's growth and development.

This volume features a compilation of country-specific chapters that explore four main themes for each country included: their position/stance on the emerging Indo-Pacific discourse; their interests, concerns and apprehensions on the developing maritime architecture in the region and their principle maritime security challenges; their possible contribution to the knowledge and discourse on the Indo-Pacific through multilateral and unilateral forums and initiatives; and their views on the emerging major power contestation and role of external powers.

In his chapter on Kenya, Brian Gicheru Kinyua aims to assess the country's decisiveness as a leading Eastern African economic hub in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. Hamad Bakar Hamad makes a case for Tanzania to emerge as a key partner for Indo-Pacific countries, especially in developing a sustainable blue economy in the Zanzibar region, and fighting the growing menace of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Neha Sinha examines the vitality of Mozambique for the security, prosperity, and stability of the Indo-Pacific region. After all, the Mozambique Channel is a key trading route for goods transiting the Cape of Good Hope to West Asia and beyond. While outlining South Africa's position on the Indo-Pacific, Denys Reva acknowledges that its maritime foreign policy approach lacks dedicated naval security and governance strategy documents that clearly outline its vision for the maritime space.

Discussing Djibouti's geostrategic position, Abhishek Mishra examines how the country, which hosts several foreign military bases, plays an outsized role in the politics of the Indo-

Pacific and has emerged as a proxy turf and geopolitical chessboard for extra-regional competition. On Nigeria, Dirk Siebeles notes that there is not much for the country to gain from participating in discussions on Indo-Pacific maritime issues as these are often linked to sovereignty questions and the increasing rivalry between India and China, Nigeria's most important trading partners. However, as the Nigerian experience has shown, a key lesson is the imperative to address maritime security challenges in context with land-based issues.

Kwang Poon notes that throughout Mauritius's recorded history, it has been the 'object of desire' for all major powers due to its geostrategic location. Mauritius is willing to promote and maintain a secure, inclusive, peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific. It already plays a leading role within the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association by hosting the headquarters of these organisations. As far as the Seychelles is concerned, Malshini Senaratne opines that the island-nation's international agenda revolves around maritime security, climate change mitigation and post-pandemic economic recovery. The Seychelles must remain mindful of balancing external influences while carefully defining its place within the Indo-Pacific to adopt a more proactive role in protecting its blue growth interests.

Lastly, Satyajit Sen makes a case for why multilateral security for the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the Southwest Indian Ocean region under the leadership of the IOC will be a positive engagement. He argues that with increased capabilities, SIDS acting under the IOC and with a common voice may engage with the major powers to secure their backyard and set the agenda on their terms as the geopolitical realities in the era of the Indo-Pacific unfold.

Africa's role and place in the Indo-Pacific are neither defined nor clearly articulated. But the African countries must determine which specific agendas of the Indo-Pacific—maritime security, marine ecology and resources, capacity building and information sharing, maritime connectivity, and disaster management—to focus on going forward. Unless these countries can articulate their interests proactively and stake a claim in the Indo-Pacific, they will miss out on participating in the decision-making processes on maritime security issues.

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# Kenya's Role in the Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific

*Brian Gicheru Kinyua*

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Over the last decade, Kenya, located on the East African seaboard, has steadily pivoted its national discourse towards the blue economy, culminating in the Sustainable Blue Economy conference in 2018 that was co-hosted with Canada and Japan.<sup>1</sup> This was an important starting point for a country that had historically focused on land-based resources.

The clamour for economic growth and job creation for Kenya's large youth population has meant the need for increased government spending on the blue economy. While government spending on blue economy initiatives is currently around US\$100 million,<sup>2</sup> there has been an overdrive to enter into bilateral and multilateral agreements aimed at boosting Kenya's position on ocean governance.

This has come at an apt time as the discourse on the Indo-Pacific agenda expands from the focus on security to accommodate an economic narrative. As China expands its footprint across the Indo-Pacific through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), countries such as the US and India seek to establish alternative "strategies" to prevent it from becoming the dominant regional power. As a result, the Indo-Pacific has turned into an area of geostrategic competition, including in global commerce. Consequently, developing countries like Kenya must step up to cement their place in this tremendously influential region.

## Making Room

In a 2013 editorial in *China Daily*, Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta argued that his country's prosperity was anchored to its geography in the Indo-Pacific region. He termed the region as "the epicenter of seismic economic phenomenon."<sup>3</sup> Kenya is attempting to position itself as a leading regional economic hub in East Africa and attract Asian business from partners like India, China and Singapore. It is a fast-growing economy that has undertaken several pro-business reforms and has emerged as a leading country in Sub-Saharan Africa in terms of information and communication technologies, information penetration, and financial technology and inclusion. Although Kenya lacks a national strategy on the Indo-Pacific, recent diplomatic and economic partnerships reveal the government's attempt to prioritise the region. Kenya's approach has broadly consisted of two vital elements—enhancing naval preparedness through capacity building and strengthening partnerships with allies.<sup>4</sup>

Kenya sees trade as a defining feature in its participation in the Indo-Pacific, which has guided its military actions in securing the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa from pirates and armed robbers at sea. The upsurge of Somali piracy in the early 2000s prompted Kenyan policymakers to recognise the Indian Ocean as a key economic pillar. At the height of such piracy attacks, Kenya reportedly lost between US\$280 million to US\$370 million per annum.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the decline of Kenya's cruise industry is attributed to these attacks; cruise liner visits to the country dropped from 35 in 2008 to zero in 2012, and Kenya lost approximately US\$15 million per annum as the cruise industry foundered.<sup>6</sup>

It was during this era that Kenya entered into numerous bilateral and multilateral agreements to boost its capacity and capabilities in maritime security, including strengthening its criminal justice system to prosecute maritime crimes, and equipment and knowledge transfer in maritime domain awareness. Specifically, following several bilateral agreements with the US and the European Union, in 2009, Kenya became the first regional state in the Western Indian Ocean to accept Somali pirates for prosecution and detention.<sup>7</sup> This was meant to bolster the enforcement capacity of foreign navies operating off the Somalian coastline in terms of counterpiracy operations. Although this deal has been terminated following the decline of Somali piracy since 2013, Kenya seems determined to expand its role in maritime security at the regional and international levels.

Kenya is a champion for global peace, security and multilateral cooperation. In August 2021, while addressing a virtual UN Security Council debate on maritime security, Kenyatta appealed for the cessation of geopolitical rivalries, which he said was creating an environment that aids maritime insecurity.<sup>8</sup> The growing competition and meddling for influence and resources in the Indian Ocean Rim by extra-regional powers, which has intensified in recent years, is a matter of regional and international concern as it undermines

the security of African coastal states. Kenyatta appealed to the major world powers to resist the lure of promoting proxy rivalries in pursuit of narrow interests.

Information sharing is also a key aspect of maritime domain awareness. Kenya has already deputed a naval liaison officer to the 34-nation Combined Maritime Forces headquarters. Kenya also has many opportunities to depute a naval liaison officer to India's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region in New Delhi. The officer can act as a contact between Kenya and the Indian Navy to share information on merchant vessels' movement and jointly tackling maritime threats.

### **Leveraging Partnerships**

But how can a country with a limited budget and fledgling maritime capacity compete for space in this world's most consequential region? The answer lies in Kenya leveraging existing bilateral agreements with the Indo-Pacific's largest- and fastest-growing economies, particularly India (one of Kenya's key developmental partners).

As a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad) along with the US, Australia and Japan, India has a pivotal role in the region. India's interests in the region were reinforced through the 2015 Maritime Strategy document that outlined its policy and acknowledged the Western Indian Ocean as a region of "primary interest"<sup>9</sup>

In June 2021, Indian foreign minister S. Jaishankar's met Kenyatta in Kenya to discuss the need for the two countries to share approaches in ensuring greater security, safety and prosperity of the Indian Ocean, focusing on the Indo-Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Kenya and India are also working to deepen their economic ties. India has proposed crafting bilateral trade agreements around the implementation of Kenya's 'Big Four Agenda', which focuses on manufacturing, affordable housing, universal health and food security.<sup>11</sup>

Kenya has also nominated its energy minister Monica Juma for the post of Secretary General of the Commonwealth.<sup>12</sup> The 54-nation grouping, comprising of former British colonies, includes some of the Indo-Pacific's fastest-growing economies, giving Kenya a unique opportunity to partner with the region.

In the aftermath of Brexit, some called for the Commonwealth to be refashioned to solve some of the most pressing problems of our time—"One possibility would be to create a group of eight within the Commonwealth comprising Britain, India, Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa, Australia, Canada and Singapore. These eight countries influence on and are implicated by the developments in the Indo-Pacific."<sup>13</sup> They can establish a dynamic vision

on the development of the Indo-Pacific, leveraging their capacities as regional trade hubs and technology centres.

Kenya's membership in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is another important opportunity to cement a role in the Indo-Pacific. As the frontier intergovernmental platform for Indian Ocean coastal countries, IORA is being leveraged to address emerging risks to maritime security in the region, and the economic and food security impacts of illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. In June 2020, Kenya collaborated with eight other IORA countries to establish a regional working group on sustaining marine welfare in the Indian Ocean.<sup>14</sup> Through this, Kenya hopes to reinvigorate its regional leadership on maritime affairs and fisheries.

To strengthen its position as Indo-Pacific's gateway to Africa, Kenya must consolidate its currently fragmented approach to the region and align its strategy with the evolving trends, including grey-zone warfare in the Indo-Pacific and climate change impacts on maritime security.

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# Assessing Tanzania's Role as a Key Maritime Partner in the Indo-Pacific

*Hamad Bakar Hamad*

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Tanzania borders the Indian Ocean on the East, with a coastline spanning over 1,424 kilometres and 241,541 square kilometres of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).<sup>1</sup> Approximately 24 percent of all Tanzanians live in the coastal regions, including the Mafia and Zanzibar islands.<sup>2</sup> The population living along the Tanzanian coastline and its massive maritime space justify Zanzibar's embrace of the Blue Economy (BE) concept as a means of transforming its economy. The African Union considers BE a sustainable use of maritime spaces, rivers, lakes, and underground waters for socioeconomic development while preserving the marine environment.<sup>3</sup>

Tanzania's internal water bodies (rivers and lakes) and an EEZ account for roughly 37 percent of the country's total land surface area of 947,303 square kilometres. Tanzania's maritime jurisdiction could potentially be extended to the outer limit of the continental shelves by claiming an additional 61,000 square kilometres of sea area. That extension will stretch Tanzania's maritime jurisdiction to the edge of Seychelles and the Comoro Islands' maritime borders, thus increasing Tanzania's maritime trade influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The increase in maritime space may also improve Zanzibar's ability to implement its BE agenda. However, Tanzania will need a robust maritime governance architecture to ensure the security of its maritime domain.

## Tanzania and the Indo-Pacific region

Tanzania's vast maritime area lies in the most strategic waters in the Indo-Pacific that support regional economy and security. Several vital Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) that connect the Western Indian Ocean region to the rest of the world pass through Tanzania's maritime waters. These SLOCs are vital for the regional economy (including energy security), humanitarian missions, and military missions.

Between 2000 and 2019, there have been large oil and gas discoveries in the East African Community (EAC) region, offering potential energy security assurance to the region and beyond. Tanzania, for instance, has an estimated 55.08 trillion cubic feet (tcf), or approximately 1,600 cubic kilometres, of proven natural gas reserves, and it has already signed 25 production-sharing agreements, eight of which are for offshore drilling.<sup>4</sup>

The discovery of oil and gas in the EAC region has made the world's major powers—the US, China, India, European Union (EU) and the UK—see it as strategically vital for their energy security. The East African region is also an important source of raw materials and a potential market for China, India, and other industrialised nations. However, the fight for market base, raw material, and energy supply will potentially militarise the region and complicate the maritime security situation. This situation will require states like Tanzania to make up their minds quickly and wisely so as not to be trapped in the superpowers' crushing wars.

On average, over 95 percent of Tanzania's international trade by volume is seaborne, with the seaports of Dar-Es-Salaam and Tanga as gateways. The Dar-Es-Salaam port also serves numerous landlocked states, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi. In addition, the Dar-Es-Salaam port and Kenya's Mombasa port are vital for international humanitarian missions for the Great Lakes region, including Somalia. For instance, the Mombasa port has been named the UN's major humanitarian supply gate in the Eastern African region.<sup>5</sup>

The world's major powers are now participating in the Africa's transport infrastructure (road, rail and port) to ensure the steady supply of raw materials and energy and access to the region's market bases. For instance, China's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road touches Tanzania directly<sup>6</sup> and Beijing has already invested significantly in road, rail and port infrastructure projects, including the US\$10-billion Bagamoyo grand port.<sup>7</sup> The port will have an installed capacity of 20 million TEUs per year and will likely be the best avenue for Chinese naval assets in the region.

In June 2021, in an attempt to counterattack Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region (and the East African region in particular), the US and the G7 partners launched a new global



infrastructure initiative, Build Back Better World (B3W), to address the infrastructure needs of the developing states.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the Chinese Silk Road initiative, which is geopolitical and purely funded by government resources, the B3W will seek financial support from private resources and focus on climate, health and security, digital technology, and gender equity and equality. As an alternative to the Chinese Silk Road initiative, the B3W is expected to place developing African countries in the middle of great-power competition between the West and China.

## **Tanzania's Maritime Security Situation**

Tanzania's maritime domain is vulnerable to various security threats—marine terrorism and piracy; trafficking of narcotics, people and illicit goods; arms proliferation, illegal fishing; and environmental crimes.<sup>9</sup> Climate change is also putting increased stress on Tanzania's coastal zones and threatens energy and food security.

Like most African states, Tanzania struggles to police its maritime domain all year round. This is because it does not have adequate naval and air assets to dispatch to maintain law and order at sea. It also lacks sufficient surveillance capability to monitor its maritime domain and is thus less informed about what is happening at sea. For that reason, Tanzania cooperates with neighbouring states and regional and international organisations to ensure the safety and security of its maritime domain, among other objectives.

Tanzania's foreign policy has changed dramatically in response to geopolitical developments. The end of the Cold War, the emergence of the US as an undisputed superpower, the increasing influence of China and India in the Western Indian Ocean region, inter-state and non-state conflicts, and increased drugs and human trafficking have led Tanzania to adjust its foreign policies, primarily related to maritime security cooperation.

Although Tanzania is open to greater cooperation within the international system, it believes in the Non-Aligned Movement. In maritime security cooperation, Tanzania stands by its values to ensure that the Indian Ocean is demilitarised, open exclusively for peaceful purposes, and always remains a zone of peace.

Tanzania is an active member of several regional and international maritime security corporations, through which it has strengthened its capacity to maintain law and order in its waters. This cooperation was critical when Tanzania's maritime waters were classified as among the "high risk areas" (HRA) for navigation in the East African region due to the widespread presence of Somali-based piracy. However, it took 12 years for Tanzania and Kenya's maritime waters to be removed entirely from HRA categorisation.<sup>10</sup>

As a prominent member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)—which focuses on maritime safety and security, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk management, tourism and cultural exchanges, education, science and technology, BE, and women’s economic empowerment—Tanzania is keen to position itself better to benefit from the organisation’s competences.<sup>11</sup> The Indian Ocean Tuna Commission (IOTC) and IORA provide Tanzania with the necessary support to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, which costs the country about US\$220 million per year.<sup>12</sup>

Tanzania has also participated in several maritime security operations as a Southern African Development Community (SADC) member. The SADC already has a maritime security strategy, which also applies to Tanzania. Additionally, Tanzania has several bilateral maritime security agreements with the US, China, India, the UK and EU to build the capacity of its maritime law enforcement agencies.

## **Conclusion**

Tanzania’s foreign policy allows for maritime security cooperation but restricts an alliance. It cooperates with individual states, regional organisations, and international institutions to make the Indian Ocean region a peaceful zone open for economic activity and not militarisation.

Tanzania acknowledges that regional and multinational maritime security cooperation is needed to combat security threats such as IUU fishing. The IORA and IOTC are apt examples of regional platforms that add value to Tanzania’s efforts to combat IUU fishing. In addition, these platforms are even more relevant to Zanzibar in implementing its BE agenda.

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# Situating Mozambique in the Indo-Pacific Discourse

*Neha Sinha*

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**T**he term Indo-Pacific has gained great significance in recent years (evolving from the previously used Asia Pacific), primarily because it encompasses the strategic link between the Indian and Pacific oceans. Lately, global attention has shifted to Asia due to the important maritime routes in the region, with most of the world's trade passing through the Indian and Pacific oceans. The importance of the Indo-Pacific will only grow as it plays an even more significant part in geostrategic and geoeconomic activities.

The eastern part of the African continent is critical to the Indo-Pacific growth story, but its inclusion in the Indo-Pacific narrative was not an easy process. Two speeches by former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe were instrumental in remaking the Indo-Pacific—first, the 'Confluence of the Two Seas' speech in India in 2007,<sup>1</sup> and second, the unveiling of the Free and Open Indo Pacific strategy in 2016 in Kenya.<sup>2</sup> The economic and military interests of the major global powers and the rising Asian economies has brought attention to the developments in East African maritime and continental space. Several East African countries have gained immense importance in recent times due to their strategic location on the west coast of the Indian Ocean and their resources and economic potential. Indeed, many countries, including those from the Indo-Pacific, are trying to establish their influence and military bases in the region.

## **A Crucial Partner**

Mozambique plays a vital role in defining the Indo-Pacific as it lies in the southeast region of the African continent. The Mozambique Channel, which lies between Madagascar and Mozambique, is a key trading route for goods transiting the Cape of Good Hope to West Asia and beyond. The channel is also a key global shipping route, carrying 30 percent of the global tanker traffic, and is slowly turning into the next major security hotspot in the Indian Ocean.<sup>3</sup> This highlights the significance of Mozambique in the safety and security of the Indo-Pacific. Given that Asia and Africa are prone to conflicts, it is important to strengthen ties between countries in both regions through a free and open Indo-Pacific maritime zone to promote stability.

While the Mozambique Channel was once a main trading route in the Indian Ocean (linking India with West Asia, and East Asia with Europe and Brazil), it lost some significance with the opening of the Suez Canal. However, the discovery of natural gas fields in the Rovuma Basin in eastern Africa, has brought renewed attention to Mozambique and the Mozambique Channel as other countries seek to tap this opportunity. Mozambique is significant to India, Japan, the US, and China, with several investing heavily in the country.

In its 2015 Maritime Security Strategy document, India outlined its policy towards the countries in the Western Indian Ocean region, which has since been diversified and expanded into a broad-based security approach.<sup>4</sup> India and Mozambique have agreed to deepen maritime cooperation based on security concerns in the African waters, and to extend humanitarian relief and disaster management operations. At the same time, China has steadily increased investments in Mozambique in mining, energy, agriculture and infrastructure, but concerns persist that this is a 'debt trap' to sustain Beijing's dominance.

Under its Indo-Pacific approach, the US aligns with India to counter China, which has already upped its ante with considerable investments in Mozambique.<sup>5</sup> During a 2017 visit to Japan, Mozambican President Filipe Nyusi emphasised the importance of strong ties between the two countries for a free and open Indo-Pacific region, and to promote peace and stability in Asia and Africa. Areas of cooperation included anti-piracy, illegal fishing and other illegal maritime activities through capacity building and enhanced connectivity. The two sides also expressed strong opposition to any unilateral actions that could alter the status quo and increase tensions, in reference to issues in the East and South China Seas.<sup>6</sup>

## **India and Mozambique: The Way Ahead**

India must endorse and encourage the growing importance of Mozambique for the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific. India's foreign policy vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific is pegged

on ensuring a rules-based order rooted in international law, openness, transparency, inclusivity, promoting economic engagement in the region. India and Mozambique must partner and cooperate on maritime, connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals, and economic development to build a robust partnership. Given Mozambique's strategic location, size, population, capacities, and widening interests, it can play a significant role in the post-COVID-19 revival of the Indo-Pacific. Mozambique must build partnerships with like-minded countries like India and become a vital part of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which aims to ensure the security and stability of the region's maritime domain.

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# Reflecting on South Africa's Place in the Indo-Pacific

*Denys Reva*

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South Africa is strategically located at the tip of the African continent, surrounded by the Atlantic, the Southern and the Indian oceans. It has a coastline of more than 3000 kilometres and an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of more than 1.5 million km<sup>2</sup>—a substantial area of responsibility that requires protection, governance and control. Furthermore, almost 96 percent of South Africa's import and export in terms of volume is transported by sea.<sup>1</sup>

South Africa is a maritime nation, an 'island economy' dependent on the well-functioning maritime sector, the safety of the sea lines of communication (SLOC), and the overall security of the maritime domain and the resources contained within its EEZ.<sup>2</sup> In that regard, the increasing militarisation and the rising geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region may present a potential challenge for South Africa's national interests and national security.

The situation is further complicated because South Africa's principal maritime interests are not well shaped or clearly defined—at least not publicly. South Africa's maritime foreign policy approach lacks dedicated security and governance strategy documents that clearly outline its objectives, needs and goals in the maritime domain or its vision of the maritime space. Instead, South Africa's maritime interests in the Indian Ocean are informed by its domestic and international peace, security and development agendas.

The most unambiguous indication of South Africa's current position towards the Indian Ocean and the scope of its interests came from Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, the former

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, during the 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The minister reiterated that South Africa perceives the Indian Ocean as the region of peace, stability and development, and condemned any presence of “foreign military and naval bases, nuclear arms and other instruments of war that endanger peace and security”.<sup>3</sup>

She has further identified three strategic priorities for South Africa in the region—maritime safety and security, enhanced disaster risk management, and sustainable and responsible fisheries management.

Deputy Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Luwellyn Landers further reiterated this position in a speech at the Indian Ocean Conference in 2018. Echoing Nkoana-Mashabane, Landers asserted that against the backdrop of the emerging Indo-Pacific region, any future regional architecture must be rooted in cooperation, with the IORA at the core.<sup>4</sup> Both statements are in line with South Africa’s long-standing foreign policy values, rooted in the principles of non-alignment, South-South cooperation, and the centrality of a multilateral approach.

Both statements also reflect South Africa’s apprehension towards the growing geopolitical competition in the region. Due to its unique geographic nature, the passage through the Indian Ocean is constrained by chokepoints. The ever-increasing international buy-in into the concept of the Indo-Pacific is set to lead to increased attention and presence of non-African states in the region.<sup>5</sup> This means that although most global powers develop a vision of the Indo-Pacific to increase their engagement in the Pacific Ocean, they need to ensure control over critical chokepoints in the Indian Ocean Region to protect its supplies and trade.

Further militarisation in the Indian Ocean, driven by the geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, goes against South Africa’s strategic interests as it undermines peace, stability, and development in the region. This issue has long been noted as a concern for Pretoria. For instance, the 2011 White Paper on South African Foreign Policy states that the Indian Ocean Rim has seen an increase in military and naval presence, owing to the growing geostrategic rivalry over the SLOC.<sup>6</sup> In particular, this can be observed in the naval build-up in Djibouti, near the Bab el-Mandeb strait.

On the regional level, these considerations informed South Africa’s instrumental role in promoting the adoption of the Maritime Security Strategy of the Southern African Development Community in 2011.<sup>7</sup> This came as a response to the growing number of incidents of piracy taking place further south, off the coasts of Tanzania and Mozambique. The National Development Plan 2030 reflected this concern by reiterating that piracy

“is putting the continent’s coasts and ports under increasing pressure,” especially in the context of South Africa’s dependence on maritime trade.<sup>8</sup>

In January 2011, at the request of Mozambique, South Africa initiated a counterpiracy operation (Operation Copper) to patrol and protect the Mozambique Channel. Although incidents of piracy have declined since 2011, South Africa’s continuous naval presence should indicate Pretoria’s commitment to act as a regional leader.<sup>9</sup> However, it may have also shown South Africa’s concern that other countries may fill the security vacuum in the absence of a response.<sup>10</sup>

This concern is becoming increasingly more relevant. The South African navy is facing a shortage of funding, which challenges the maintenance and preservation of the existing naval capacity. In 2019, the Chief of the South African Navy (SAN), Vice Admiral Mosiwa Hlongwane, stated that at the current rate, South Africa will lose its frigate and submarine capability by 2023.<sup>11</sup>

The situation is unlikely to be resolved soon as the budget constraints will remain. As a result, South Africa finds itself in a vulnerable position. It may soon lose the capacity to provide protection at sea in support of its national interests along the coasts, and the capability to fulfil its international interests, rights and responsibilities.

According to the 2006 SAN Doctrine, South Africa does not face a conventional naval threat.<sup>12</sup> The 2015 Defence Review further confirmed that the biggest maritime threat for South Africa is the illegal movement of people and goods, and exploitation of the nation’s marine resources.<sup>13</sup> South Africa’s declining naval capacity will unlikely result in a direct threat of conventional warfare. Still, it may render it and other states in the region dependent on extra-regional partners for maritime security.

Despite these challenges, the emerging geopolitical region may also present new opportunities for South Africa. The country already engages closely with China as part of its Belt and Road Initiative and was one of the countries present at the inception of the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor in 2017. Both initiatives form part of the respective Indo-Pacific approaches by China, and India and Japan. However, to maximise the benefits from increasing cooperation and to minimise risks, South Africa needs to resolve a number of serious obstacles.

Firstly, South Africa voiced its preference for a multilateral approach, with a particular role dedicated to IORA as a platform for cooperation. Yet, IORA as a vehicle for collaboration has not proven itself to be operational. For instance, during its chairship of the organisation, one of South Africa’s objectives was to conclude a memorandum of understanding (MoU)

between the IORA and the African Union. The MoU was supposed to have, among other things, aligned the implementation of IORA's blue economy strategy with the 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy and the Agenda 2063, but it is yet to be concluded.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, most extra-regional countries seeking to expand their presence in the region have either outlined or declared their interest to increase bilateral and multilateral cooperation with African states. For instance, countries like the UK, Italy, Germany, China, South Korea, and Japan have joined IORA as dialogue partners, while France has become the 23rd country to join the organisation. The increased interest presents an opportunity to improve maritime security collaboration for South Africa. Yet, any concrete cooperation will require South Africa to clearly articulate its foreign and domestic maritime policy.

In terms of foreign policy, South Africa's position ensures a degree of flexibility to avoid becoming trapped in a geopolitical rivalry. But it also lacks clarity on South Africa's vision and position on the Indo-Pacific region, limiting the opportunity for cooperation. It may further lead to reactivity in South Africa's international affairs, whereby Pretoria will respond to the developments in the region post-factum instead of leading and shaping the process based on its interests.

In terms of domestic policy, South Africa's Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries has initiated the new Oceans Economy Master Plan to address the shortcomings of its 2014 Operation Phakisa Oceans Initiative.<sup>a,15</sup> The scope and nature of the planned interventions are not yet clear. The process is set to be completed by December 2021, and the new master plan could provide more nuance to South Africa's maritime needs and interests.<sup>16</sup> South Africa also needs to conclude developing its National Maritime Security Strategy that began in 2019.

The process of clearly defining South Africa's domestic and international maritime security interests and needs will provide a framework for collaboration. Not just between South African government departments, but also between South Africa and its non-African partners for improved maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region.

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a Operation Phakisa Oceans Economy was launched in 2014 with the objective of achieving a rapid development of South Africa's ocean economy. It was estimated that the project will fast-track the development of the maritime sector and create more than 1 million jobs, with about US\$177 billion in investment by 2033. The 2019 review indicated that Operation Phakisa has achieved some notable successes, especially with regard to establishing and cementing a maritime governance framework. Yet, the project failed to deliver on key stated objectives (generate employment and investment in the maritime sector). While it managed to attract R41,1 billion in investments in maritime industries, it has created fewer than 10,000 direct jobs, well short of the target of 77,000. Furthermore, most jobs and investment were generated by the oil and gas sector, while the contribution of other sectors was minimal.

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# No Strategic Concerns, Two Vital Partners: Nigeria's Perspective on the Indo-Pacific

*Dirk Siebels*

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**D**evelopments in the Indo-Pacific are not only important for littoral countries in the region, but they also often have ramifications around the world. However, any active involvement is a complicated—and often delicate—issue. For example, from a Nigerian point of view, there is not much to gain from getting involved in discussions on maritime issues in the Indo-Pacific. These are often linked to sovereignty questions and the increasing rivalry between India and China, Nigeria's most important trading partners. This showcases why there are virtually no official sources, political declarations, or even speeches referring to events in the Indo-Pacific from a Nigerian perspective.

Nigeria is likely to steer clear of getting involved in any discussion related to the Indo-Pacific. While the country is often described as a regional hegemon in West Africa, Nigerian government representatives have not been known for any active involvement in political issues outside the African continent with a clear focus on West Africa. This stance is unlikely to change given that domestic challenges—such as security threats, economic development, and the fight against poverty—are more critical subjects of political debate in Nigeria.

At the same time, there are very practical reasons for Nigeria to steer clear of discussions related to the Indo-Pacific, an area that is not a strategic concern for Abuja. India and China are irreplaceable trading partners for Nigeria's struggling economy. When it comes to development finance, for example, China is an important lender, particularly for vital

infrastructure development, such as railway projects,<sup>1</sup> the construction of airport terminals,<sup>2</sup> and upgrading port infrastructure.<sup>3</sup> Trade between Nigeria and China increased from less than US\$2 billion in 2003 to an estimated US\$20 billion in 2019. While Nigeria's trade deficit remains significant,<sup>4</sup> Chinese investments in the country is likely to be vital for the longer-term transformation of its economy.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, India has become Nigeria's largest export destination for crude oil, which is by far the country's most important source of foreign exchange earnings and overall government revenue.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Nigeria is India's largest trading partner in Africa, partly due to Indian companies having already invested over US\$15 billion in the country.<sup>7</sup> These investments may be boosted by ongoing infrastructure development such as the new Lagos Free Zone,<sup>8</sup> which will be integrated into the Lekki Deep Sea Port when it officially opens (currently scheduled for 2023).

These figures highlight that Nigeria cannot afford to lose China or India as economic partners. Any form of active involvement in the Indo-Pacific is very likely to eventually result in a political confrontation with at least one of these countries as their rivalry looks set to grow in the coming years.

### **Regional Cooperation Efforts**

Nigeria does not actively contribute to the maritime security architecture in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) that has emerged over the past decade due to geographic reasons and its many existing national and regional security challenges. Nigeria's navy and the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency are actively involved in regional cooperation with other countries in West and Central Africa.

Maritime security cooperation between countries located on the western side of the African continent has improved in recent years, going back to the Yaoundé Code of Conduct adopted in 2013. The document highlighted a broad range of maritime security issues, including piracy and armed robbery at sea. This aspect was a significant difference to the Djibouti Code of Conduct adopted in 2009 by many countries around the Indian Ocean, yet it was purely aimed at countering Somalia-based piracy.<sup>a,9</sup>

Much like all other measures aimed at increasing any form of regional cooperation in West and Central Africa, the actual implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct has

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a The scope of the Djibouti Code of Conduct was only broadened in 2017 with the Jeddah Amendment.



been hampered by shortcomings in financial and human resources. Maritime agencies in Nigeria and elsewhere across the region often lack the capabilities to operate beyond the immediate vicinity of their bases. The surveillance of shipping or fishing activities at sea remains limited at best, despite ongoing efforts in Nigeria<sup>10</sup> and, to a more limited extent, other countries across the region.

Despite such problems, much progress has been made in recent years. Aside from several operational centres where naval activities are coordinated between neighbouring countries, the Inter-Regional Coordination Centre in Yaoundé, Cameroon, is working hard to improve political efforts and leverage support from other stakeholders, including international governments or the maritime industry.

In general, the structure that is now in place in the region is primarily based on existing organisations, notably the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of Central African States. This is hardly a perfect blueprint for maritime security cooperation in the IOR, which brings together countries with a diverse set of capabilities or political priorities, including those on the African coastline, small island nations, the Gulf states or India, as well as extra-regional stakeholders with a keen interest in the region.

## **Conclusion**

Despite some significant differences, regional cooperation in West and Central Africa can provide at least some lessons for cooperation within the IOR or even the broader Indo-Pacific. One of the most important aspects is the avoidance of misguided priorities by outside partners. Virtually all governments in Africa—and arguably those in countries bordering the Indo-Pacific as well—are facing a broad variety of security challenges with maritime security being only a relatively small subset. However, maritime issues are often discussed without much regard for this broader context.

When security threats at sea are addressed by additional funding or specific assistance to relevant agencies, it can lead to institutional rivalries on the domestic level. Government representatives are generally keen on avoiding such issues, yet outside partners may pressure them. Evolution instead of revolution is a much more sustainable strategy, even though it does not yield the immediate benefits that policymakers often desperately see.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, it is vital to improve naval and law enforcement capacities at sea in general rather than focus these efforts to address merely one particularly pressing concern. Counterpiracy activities in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Guinea are arguably the best examples. While attacks against merchant ships at sea have been a major concern for the shipping industry

in both regions, the impact of other issues such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing has received much less attention. At the same time, the financial impact of IUU fishing alone is much higher than the negative effects of piracy. Moreover, it directly affects vulnerable coastal communities where artisanal fishing is one of few economic opportunities.

Overall, experiences from Nigeria and its regional partners underline the importance of maritime security challenges and the need to address those in context with land-based issues. It is one of the key lessons that should be considered by governments in the Indo-Pacific region when any maritime challenge is discussed either at the bilateral level or within a regional forum.

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# Djibouti: The Locus of Great Power Competition in the Indo-Pacific

*Abhishek Mishra*

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**S**ituated at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, with a deep water port on a globally significant trade route through which 30 percent of global shipping passes, Djibouti is one of the most strategically located countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> Its strategic position and relative political stability following a three-year civil war between the Issas and Afars have provided a conducive environment for hosting foreign military bases. The most prominent are the US's Camp Lemonnier base, Japan's Ambouli airport, France's Héron naval base, and the Chinese base that functions as a supply centre for peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance operations. In addition, Djibouti's position on the Bab el-Mandeb strait—which forms a vital choke point for the flow of oil and international commerce and is the shortest trade route between the Mediterranean region, the Indian Ocean and East Asia—helps to funnel billions of dollars in maritime trade. In 2018, the US Energy Information Administration estimated that 6.2 million barrels of crude oil and refined petroleum products flowed through Bab el-Mandeb per day.<sup>2</sup>

The facilities at the Port of Djibouti are important to sea transportation companies for fuel bunkering and refuelling. Its transport facilities are used by several landlocked African countries, most notably Ethiopia, to re-export their goods. Djibouti port alone handles over 90 percent of in-bound and out-bound trade from Ethiopia. From this trade, Djibouti earns transit taxes and harbour fees, which forms the bulk of the government's revenues, in addition to the handsome amounts of rent revenues it earns from hosting foreign military

bases, which is estimated to be around US\$300 million annually.<sup>3</sup> These factors have made Djibouti the most dominant port service provider in the Horn of Africa and Red Sea region.

Competing interests between major powers are playing out in various ways in Djibouti. However, the rationale behind setting up a flurry of foreign military bases in Djibouti is driven by a certain set of interests common to all foreign states involved. These include ensuring the continued flow of trade through the Bab el-Mandeb strait; conducting naval counter-piracy operations; tackling the growing number of transnational maritime crimes by non-state actors; and stabilising the region's weak states like Eritrea, Somalia, and Yemen.

But there is also a downside to such an extensive foreign presence. The competition for influence in the Horn of Africa has led to a multiplicity of activities that overcrowd the security landscape in the region.<sup>4</sup> This has subsequently led to several ad-hoc regional response structures such as the Multinational Joint Task Force<sup>a</sup> or the Joint Force of the Group of Five of the Sahel (G5 Sahel).<sup>b</sup> Moreover, the US-China rivalry could also have a destabilising impact in the region. In many ways, Africa—and Djibouti in particular—is turning into a proxy-turf and geopolitical chessboard for extra-regional competition.<sup>c,5</sup>

### **Situating Djibouti in the Indo-Pacific**

The Indo-Pacific era is now a reality. Initially, the original definition of the Indo-Pacific did not include the Eastern and Southern African seaboard. Instead, it was defined as spanning from the western coast of India to the US's west coast. However, this restrictive understanding of the contours of the Indo-Pacific, as propagated by the US, soon made way for an inclusive, whole-of-government approach. The major turning point was the launch of Japan's Free and Open

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a The Multinational Joint Task Force (MJTF) is a combined multilateral operation, mostly comprising military units from Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The MJTF's mandate is to bring an end to the Boko Haram insurgency.

b The G5 Sahel, formed in 2014, is an institutional framework for the coordination of regional cooperation in development policies and security matters in the West African region. It is made up of five Sahel countries— Chad, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Niger.

c Classified American intelligence reports suggest China is planning to establish its first permanent military presence on the Atlantic Ocean in Equatorial Guinea, sparking security concerns in the US over growing Chinese military ambitions in Africa.

Indo Pacific strategy, unveiled in 2016 in Kenya. Japan's strategy, unlike that of the US, incorporated East African and Western Indian Ocean littorals within the Indo-Pacific. This view aligned with India's geographic conception of the Indo-Pacific, which stretches from the littorals of East Africa and West Asia, across the Indian and Western Pacific Ocean, to the littorals of East Asia. In 2017, India and Japan unveiled the Asia Africa Growth Corridor, which underscored their desire to work together and support Africa's development.<sup>6</sup> In conjunction with the wider acceptability of the Indo-Pacific construct and emergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad), these developments led Washington to right the divergence in strategic mapping by incorporating eastern Africa within its Indo-Pacific policy.

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific construct has presented African countries with a critical opportunity to create inclusive partnerships within the parameters of sovereignty and equality. The escalation of piracy off the coast of Somalia provided the initial impetus for extra-regional countries to increase their presence and promote the stability and security of the region. Due to the increase in the number of non-traditional and transnational threats in the maritime space, Africa's international partners and some global organisations, such as the International Maritime Organization, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the European Union, have undertaken several maritime capacity-building initiatives to augment the ability of African states to secure their maritime domain. Now, countries are vying to establish a permanent presence in Africa to protect and promote their vested interests.

Despite the associated risks to host countries like Djibouti, there are also specific opportunities. Today, Djibouti plays an outsized role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and has emerged as a conduit for strategic real estate. Through foreign military bases, the Djiboutian state has effectively strengthened and leveraged its geostrategic position to exert agency and balance the interest of competing powers to its benefit. As major power rivalries in the region continue to rise, Djibouti is set to emerge as the locus of great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

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# Diving Deep into Indo-Pacific's Geopolitical Waters: The Case of Mauritius

*Kwang Poon*

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Currently, the Indian Ocean is the theatre of great power rivalry due to its primary importance in world trade, energy security, and as the locus for critical sea lines of communications. An incumbent or emerging superpower with any real ambition and sense of history will have placed Mauritius in its strategic calculus. To paraphrase US Admiral Alfred Mahan, “He who controls the Indian Ocean shall control the world.” As its emblem indicates, Mauritius is the star and key of the Indian Ocean and has been the object of great power contest over nearly a millennium.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of the Chagos issue,<sup>a,2</sup> Mauritius has highlighted that it appreciates the geostrategic importance of the American base on the Diego Garcia atoll.<sup>3</sup> On the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), the Mauritian government has guaranteed that it will keep the military base even after sovereignty is restored. However, the US Department of State believes that the “relationship between the US and UK is special and cannot be easily replicated.”<sup>4</sup>

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a Carajos and the Chagos archipelago, including Diego Garcia, and any other island are considered part of the country. The Mauritian government has stated that it does not recognise the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), which the UK created by excising the Chagos archipelago from the territory of Mauritius prior to its independence, and claims that the Chagos archipelago (including Diego Garcia) forms an integral part of the territory of Mauritius under both Mauritian and international law. In 1965, the UK split the Chagos Archipelago away from Mauritius and few islands from Seychelles to form the BIOT. In 2010, Mauritius initiated proceedings under the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas to challenge the legality of the UK's claim. On 18 March 2015, the Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled that the Chagos Marine Protected Area was illegal. On 28 January 2021, the UN's International Tribunal for Law of the Sea ruled that the UK has no sovereignty over the Chagos archipelago, and that Mauritius is the sovereign there. The UK continues to dispute and not recognise the tribunal's decision.

Mauritius believes that the Indian Ocean component within the Indo Pacific construct is vital. The world's centre of gravity is shifting eastwards towards the Indian Ocean, linking Asia, Africa, Europe, the Americas and Australasia. The Indian Ocean is also witnessing increasing maritime traffic. For instance, the maritime routes are strategic for the international trade of China, which has revived the voyages of Zheng He to highlight its historical presence in the Indian Ocean and has readapted the ancient tea and spice routes to formulate its grand 21<sup>st</sup> Century Maritime Silk Road initiative.

Unsurprisingly, littoral powers such as India, which considers the Indian Ocean its backyard and has a legitimate stake, has expressed concern. Thus, India and Mauritius have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to improve sea and air transportation facilities in Agaléga Island<sup>5</sup> after the Seychelles parliament did not ratify a similar agreement on Assumption Island. On several occasions and in various platforms, India has also aired its aspirations to be the “net security provider” in the Indian Ocean.<sup>6</sup>

### **Prioritising Maritime Security**

Mauritius and Madagascar recognise that a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific is essential for the peace, stability, and prosperity of the region. Accordingly, during Malagasy President Andry Rajoelina's visit to Mauritius in 2019, Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth proposed the setting up of a regional maritime shipping line joint venture to optimise freight and reduce costs in the region.<sup>7</sup>

The European Union has also been quite active through the Indian Ocean Commission to promote maritime security. France has shown a resolve to maintain a strong presence in the region and has competing sovereignty claims against Mauritius over Tromelin Island.

Adding to the complexity of this equation is the sovereignty issue over Chagos and the new variable of Agaléga.<sup>b,8</sup> To find a way out of these murky waters, Mauritius has hosted two editions of the Ministerial Conference on Maritime Security focusing on the South-West Indian Ocean.<sup>9</sup>

Mauritius has been the ‘object of desire’ for all major powers throughout its history due to its geostrategic location.<sup>10</sup> Today, this rivalry is mainly centred on the tussle between India

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b In 2015, India and Mauritius signed a MoU for the improvement in sea and air transportation facilities on the Agaléga Island. The project has received backlash from locals over territorial and environmental concerns. The manner in which the media reported on the agreement between the two countries gave the sense that Agaléga was to become an outright Indian military base, prompting outrage in Mauritius. The issue further escalated when *Al Jazeera* published an exclusive report in August 2021 with satellite imagery showing that India was constructing an airstrip and jetty on the island. This prompted the Mauritian government to deny that it has allowed India to build a military base on the island of Agaléga.

and China, with the US taking an increasing interest. India views the ports that China is building along the new Maritime Silk Road as a potential encirclement trap, referred to as the “string of pearls”. India has responded by building its own “garland of flowers”.<sup>11</sup>

As far as the island of Diego Garcia is concerned, Mauritius is unlikely to change the status quo even after sovereignty is returned. However, the US may not see the rise of emerging powers, be it India or China, favourably. In fact, the recent media campaign against the militarisation of Agaléga is carefully timed as debate heats up over the ultimate application of the facility to such an extent that the senior advisor to the Mauritian Prime Minister’s Office had to publicly dismiss the claims that the island will turn into a military base.<sup>12</sup> In reality, India has the upper hand by playing its joker card through leveraging its ‘deep historical and umbilical’ diasporic links between ‘Chota Bharat’ and India.

The installation at Agaléga is a necessity for the region’s maritime security and to balance the influence of other superpowers. The degree and scale of the defence installations should be sufficient to act as a credible deterrent but not so large and conspicuous as to ignite an arms race. Indeed, stakeholders have made their voices heard for a “denuclearized zone” and the respect of the Pelindaba Treaty.<sup>c,13</sup> Planned installations at Agaléga should assist in the surveillance of Mauritius’ vast exclusive economic zone; in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; in conducting anti-piracy and maritime search and rescue operations; and in enhancing Mauritius’ maritime domain awareness capabilities.

### **From FOIP to SIPFOIP**

Two extreme scenarios can develop in the Indo-Pacific. The worst-case scenario is the eruption of what could become the Third World War. An incident at any of the flashpoints in the region could ignite this scenario—China could make a move against Taiwan in the East China Sea; a freedom-of-navigation operation could turn nasty in the South China Sea; border tensions between India and China could escalate; there could be an incident in the Strait of Malacca, Strait of Hormuz or Suez Canal; or there could be a small incident in Djibouti near the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.

On the other hand, the most optimistic scenario is where all nations cooperate actively and in good faith to ensure a secure, inclusive, peaceful, free and open Indo-Pacific (SIPFOIP).

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c The African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty, also known as the “Pelindaba Treaty,” established the nuclear-weapon-free zone on the African continent. It opened for signature on 12 April 1996 in Cairo, Egypt, and entered into force on 15 July 2009. The Pelindaba Treaty prohibits the research, development, manufacture, stockpiling, acquisition, testing, possession, control or stationing of nuclear weapons, as well as the dumping of radioactive wastes.

The current situation lies between these two extremes, and the delicate balance is highly dynamic and shifting. Two distinct groups are emerging—the US-led one that is united by “shared democratic values” and a commitment to upholding the “rules-based international order”; and the China-led coalition that is fighting against the “imperial hegemony” and “might-is-right-attitude” of the US.

US President Joe Biden has engaged with Quad and the G7 to develop a strong ‘united front’ against China. The recent creation of AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK and the US) is another step in that direction, although the move has understandably upset France.<sup>14</sup>

In this context and volatile environment, Mauritius has proposed to create an Indo-Pacific Council to foster dialogue and prevent marked tensions from escalating into armed conflicts. Regular meetings through various platforms (such as the Shangri-La Dialogue Raisina Dialogue) should be scheduled to promote good communication and fruitful cooperation. Through regular and multilevel dialogues, Mauritius hopes to avoid unfortunate misunderstandings and serious miscalculations.

Such discussions could later explore matters like undersea resources exploration and exploitation, maritime patrol and surveillance, satellite remote sensing, reef conservation and marine biodiversity, marine pollution, anti-piracy and freedom of navigation, capacity building for coast guards and other issues of common interest. Mauritius and other small island states in the Indo-Pacific consider climate change adaptation and mitigation, oil spill management, and maritime disaster response as highly urgent.

Mauritius is willing to contribute to promoting and maintaining a SIPFOIP. As a key stakeholder in the geopolitics of the Indian Ocean, it is already playing a leading role within the Indian Ocean Commission and IOC and the Indian Ocean Rim Association by hosting the headquarters of these multilateral organisations. The proposed Indo-Pacific Council will serve as an enlarged platform to harmonise the myriad voices of both littoral and non-littoral states. It is hoped that the Indo-Pacific Council will contribute constructively to the Indo-Pacific discourse and help propagate ‘positive energies’ across this strategic space.

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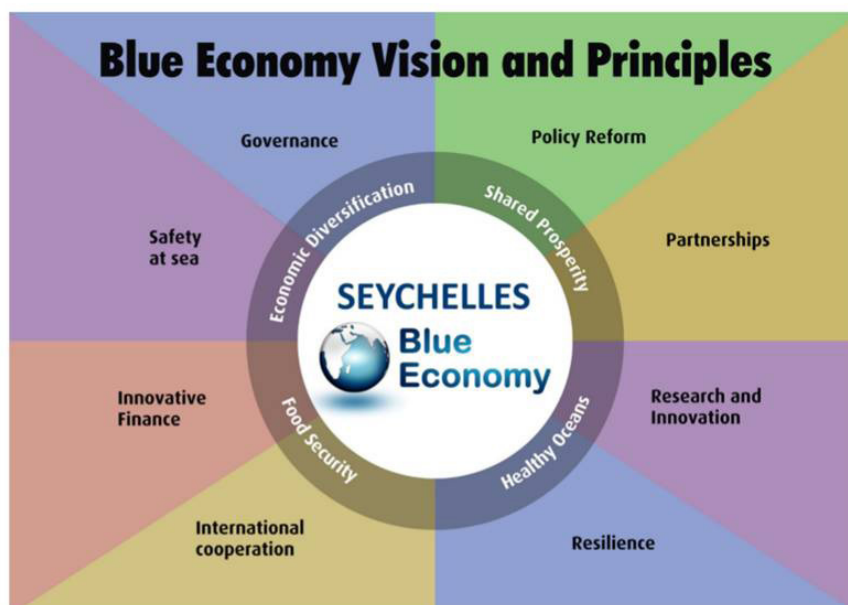
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# Seychelles and the Indo-Pacific: Protecting Blue Growth Interests

*Malshini Senaratne*

The Seychelles, located 4 degrees south of the equator in a somewhat remote stretch of the western Indian Ocean and with a landmass totalling only 455 sq. km, has notable geopolitical strengths that provide it with some leverage in international matters. With an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) encompassing 1.3 sq. km of ocean space, the archipelago has repositioned itself as a Large Ocean State through the launch of a Blue Economy (BE) Roadmap and Strategic Framework.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1: Overarching Principles of the Seychelles' Blue Economy**



Source: UNCTAD<sup>2</sup>

Through the BE Roadmap, the Seychelles has emphasised key economic activities in the EEZ that relate to transportation, tourism, and fisheries, which together account for about 44% of the country's GDP.<sup>3</sup> In addition, in keeping with its aims for sustainable ocean-based development, the country declared 30% of its waters a Marine Protected Area. Meanwhile, growing transnational interests and tensions among Indo-Pacific powers in the Indian Ocean has seen the country assume an important regional role in protecting national interests around ocean conservation and sustainable development, while also seeking to balance the influences of its international partners.<sup>4</sup> While the Seychelles has not declared an official policy stance on the Indo-Pacific, its engagement with countries in the region reflects some key concerns about its BE agenda.

### **Facets of the Seychelles' BE Agenda**

Human and drug trafficking, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, poaching and piracy are among the illicit maritime activities that threaten the Seychelles' BE agenda.<sup>5</sup> Piracy, in particular, has had a deep impact on the Seychelles and threatens vital sea lines of communication (SLOC) in the region. In response, the island-nation has sought international aid to bolster its coast guard while forging agreements with countries in the Indo-Pacific, such as the US, India and Sri Lanka, to become the primary regional state in prosecuting pirates.<sup>6</sup>

As the COVID-19 pandemic looks set to persist for the foreseeable future and as the Seychelles has had to consider economic recovery, it has been forced to look beyond the tourism sector. The fisheries and agriculture sectors have received greater national attention in the form of free land for farming, new fishing regulations, and international agreements that now include environmental fund clauses.<sup>7</sup>

Climate change is also at the forefront of the Seychelles' international agenda. It has long recognised the importance of international collaborations around climate change mitigation and is a signatory to the Paris Agreement and submitted its first voluntary national review outlining its implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals to the United Nations (UN) in 2020.<sup>8</sup> Linked to this, several Indo-Pacific countries are increasingly seeking collaborations with African littorals through regional multilateral forums to provide more exposure to the BE agenda. In 2020, India, Japan and the UN joined the Indian Ocean Commission known for its promotion of the BE-based approach, and of which the Seychelles is a founding member.<sup>9</sup> In addition, during the seventh Indian Ocean Dialogue in February 2021, member states of the Indian Ocean Rim Association recognised the importance of BE for the region, especially in holding a disproportionate sum of the world's blue carbon ecosystems and a key future trend in the fight against climate change.<sup>10</sup>



## The Seychelles and External Powers

The Seychelles is a small but powerful voice in the Indian Ocean and external powers must pay attention to non-traditional concerns that lie at the heart of the island-nation's BE agenda. For example, the July 2020 grounding of the Japanese-owned *MV Wakashio* off the southeast coast of Mauritius was a stark reminder of the threats facing SLOCs and the impact on sea life. To this end, under a Hydrographic Cooperation memorandum of understanding signed in 2015, India conducted surveys in the Seychelles' waters to update the nautical charts, facilitate the implementation of national projects, and reinforce safety for maritime-related activities.<sup>11</sup>

Given its strategic location near key maritime chokepoints, the Seychelles has also pushed back on attempts to increase the presence of foreign militaries.<sup>12</sup> For example, a Seychelles-India agreement to build a naval base on Assumption Island was met with public backlash and stalled, while the proposed facility on the Mauritian island of North Agalega is going ahead.<sup>13</sup>

The Seychelles has received many infrastructure investments, loans, and grants from various Indo-Pacific countries, while the Gulf countries and China have also been instrumental partners in the archipelago's development. In January 2021, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the Seychelles to promote the Belt and Road Initiative, and the two sides declared their intention to enhance cooperation in BE, tourism, environmental protection and renewable energy.<sup>14</sup> Even as other global powers continue to be wary of China, it is worth noting that it remains the only country with diplomatic missions across all six island-nations in the western Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Comoros and Madagascar).<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, other countries are also expanding their ties in the Seychelles. In 2019, Japan opened an embassy in the country and committed to supporting the Seychelles in maritime security, fisheries, and conservation.<sup>16</sup> In May 2021, the national assembly approved the ratification of a bilateral agreement with the US to help increase surveillance abilities in the Seychelles' waters to counter illegal maritime activity.<sup>17</sup> However, as relations strengthen, analysts note Seychelles might need to articulate a firmer stance on US-centric issues such as Diego Garcia, home to the joint US-UK base.<sup>18</sup> While the Seychelles is closer to Chagos than Mauritius and houses some of the displaced Chagossian population, it remains cautious to Mauritian sensibilities and may defer to the 'diplomatic solidarity' expected by the wider African Union.<sup>19</sup>

The Seychelles has somewhat deftly navigated the swirl of geopolitical tides that surround it through a 'friend to all, enemy to none' approach, although this may become increasingly

tested.<sup>20</sup> External assistance to aid economic recovery will require careful diplomacy and the willingness to stand firm on non-traditional issues that disproportionately affect the island-nation.<sup>21</sup> For now, preserving the archipelago's sovereignty seems to be a priority for the new government.<sup>22</sup> So-called 'Creole diplomacy' met vaccine diplomacy with aplomb when the Seychelles carefully balanced the acceptance of donations of Sinopharm, Astra Zeneca, Sputnik V and Pfizer vaccines, respectively.<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

The Seychelles is increasingly recognised as a regional leader in charting a sustainable development pathway based on ocean conservation through its BE agenda. Given the importance of the Indian Ocean for the country's very existence, it will be imperative for the state to maintain a prospective, viable and well-regulated environment to counter potentially miscalculated 'power grabs' under a blue growth banner.<sup>24</sup> The Seychelles' role in the Indo-Pacific could become more significant by upholding the guiding principles that dictate present foreign policy—the rule of law, self-determination, regional cooperation and friendly relations with other states—and adding direction and focus to the BE agenda through regional bodies.<sup>25</sup> The country has already taken pole position on blue growth issues in the region, as evidenced through the launch of the world's first blue bond and debt-for-nature swap. Nevertheless, it acknowledges that its blue growth agenda cannot be enforced through sheer willpower.<sup>26</sup> As the western Indian Ocean region sees increased jostling for dominance, the prevalence of bodies such as the IOC and IORA will be instrumental in securing a rules-based order.

The Seychelles' international agenda revolves around maritime security, climate change mitigation and economic recovery. The country recognises the importance of international aid in its development but stresses the idea of sovereignty and repels suggestions of neocolonialism.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it will be crucial for the state to balance external influences and carefully define its place within the Indo-Pacific while adopting a more proactive role in protecting its blue growth interests.

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# Multilateralism, Security and Development: Indian Ocean Commission in the Indo-Pacific Era

*S.S. Sen*

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**T**he Indian Ocean is a quintessential element of the Indo-Pacific construct. The region faces considerable maritime security and developmental challenges,<sup>1</sup> and so the littorals are of strategic interest to the regional and extra-regional major powers shaping the Indo-Pacific. Among these littorals are the African Small Island Developing States (SIDS) of the South-West Indian Ocean (SWIO) region—Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros, and Madagascar. The four SIDS have emerged as critical security and development partners for the major powers competing for regional influence.<sup>2</sup> Security, survivability, and maneuverability, particularly around the major powers' competing interests, remain crucial for the SIDS.

The SIDS of the SWIO region are critically significant and remain important actors in the region's security and development nexus. These SIDS are unique insular spaces with the distinctive character of being surrounded by large exclusive economic zones with considerable maritime security challenges of their own. Like most other islands, these SIDS have low-lying landmass, making them vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.<sup>3</sup> The Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)<sup>a</sup> can mitigate these maritime security challenges while ensuring common security and development strategies for its members in the era of the Indo-Pacific. The prospects of multilateralism amongst SIDS in the SWIO region seem promising.

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a The Indian Ocean Commission is an intergovernmental organisation created in 1982 by the Port Louis Declaration and institutionalised in 1984 by the Victoria Agreement.

## The Scope of the Indian Ocean Commission

The sovereign islands of the SWIO region are members of the IOC, including the Réunion. Since Réunion is a French overseas region and department, France becomes a constituent member of the IOC. Nevertheless, the IOC primarily remains an intergovernmental organisation of SIDS of the SWIO.<sup>4</sup> These SIDS differ in size, capabilities and levels of development. While a few territorial disputes exist in the region, the SIDS have shown no inclination to settle these territorial disputes through military actions. Instead, most territorial disputes have been dealt with peacefully through diplomacy. For instance, France and Seychelles signed the Maritime Boundary Agreement in 2001, and Seychelles accepted French sovereignty over Glorioso Islands.<sup>5</sup> But Comoros's military invasion of Anjouan Island was an exception.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of bilateral and multilateral cooperation is enunciated amongst the SIDS of the region. However, whether these SIDS can handle the region's maritime security challenges under the umbrella of the IOC while strategising against the competing interests of the major powers remains a moot question. When Hamada Madi Boléro of Comoros was appointed the Secretary-General of the IOC in 2016, he made security the priority of his term.<sup>7</sup> Although Boléro was concerned with non-traditional security threats such as piracy, drug trafficking, food security and terrorism, he understood the importance of the IOC as an institution in ensuring collective security.

Boléro attempted to find support from member SIDS on turning the IOC into a full-fledged regional organisation from a mere technical committee. According to him, "Once this is done we will be able to think big. We will have one voice to defend our interests in other bigger regional organizations, as well as at the international level."<sup>8</sup>

The IOC holds remarkable promise for the future of the region. The region's combined population would be roughly 28 million, and their combined GDP (nominal) would be a little over US\$30 billion.<sup>9</sup> There is considerable room for enhancing security capabilities by working together. There is potential for the IOC to act as a security provider for the region, much like the Regional Security System of the Eastern Caribbean States.<sup>10</sup> The unique combination of hard and soft power elements and smart and nimble strategy development can enhance and protect the SIDS' regional interests from the influence of external powers.

Despite being modest, the military and maritime defence capabilities of these SIDS can be effective but need to be steadily enhanced under a common IOC defence policy to ensure the security and development of the region on its terms and to create an outright strategic autonomy of IOC members. But agreeing on a common defence policy is certainly not easy. The involvement of the major powers and their bilateral relationships with IOC members

cannot be ignored, especially concerning maritime security and development.<sup>11</sup> Such relationships define the region's Indo-Pacific dynamics.

### **Towards Common Security and Development**

Given the bilateral security and development partnership between the SWIO region's SIDS and the major powers, how can these countries manoeuvre between the competing interests and maintain their independence without being caught into the web of influence?<sup>12</sup> The potential of the IOC and the idea that the region can speak in the same voice, as envisioned by Boléro, might be a solution. However, this may require the IOC to evolve into a more robust regional security and development organisation that can act on behalf of these SIDS and put the interests of the region above the interests of the major competing powers. Recalibrating the IOC to ensure common security and development pathways should remain more desirable for these SIDS in the future. However, the IOC and its member states face many capacity and regional integration challenges.<sup>13</sup>

The Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Head of Delegation of Member States of the IOC met in Moroni, Union of Comoros, in August 2019 to strengthen the regional solidarity through a new and renewed mandate for the IOC. The 2019 Moroni Declaration on the Future of the IOC and the revised 2020 Victoria Agreement set out a shared geopolitical vision of the IOC member states and delineate the organisation's institutional and functional evolution, encapsulating a common voice of its member. Today, the IOC is undergoing modernisation and prioritises peace and stability, economy, environment, and human development. The immediate security challenges for the SWIO region are more non-traditional. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, piracy, organised crime such as drug trafficking and human trafficking, sea-borne terrorism, climate change and sea-level rise, and blue economy dominate the region's primary security concerns.<sup>14</sup>

An appropriate strategy for the region's SIDS is to act under the IOC to address these non-traditional challenges. Conceptualising such multilateral engagement for the SIDS of the SWIO region may require a construction similar to the "multilateral security engagement zone" proposed by Ivelaw Griffith for Caribbean security.<sup>15</sup> The security engagement under the aegis of the IOC may lead to enhanced coordination with major powers and external multilateral organisations. After all, the IOC's objective is to develop the region and strengthen its member states' external relations.

France's presence as a member of the IOC, and the inclusion of the European Union (EU), India, Japan and China as observers should receive favourable consideration. Such inclusion might lead to solidarity and help the IOC overcome institutional challenges, increase capabilities, and enhance its importance as a credible regional organisation.<sup>16</sup> The

IOC's engagement with the EU through the MASE maritime security programme, the EU's financial support to the organisation's priority areas, and the IOC's institutional capacity development remains particularly crucial for overall capacity building.

## **Conclusion**

The multilateral IOC shall remain pivotal in shaping the engagement of the SIDS of the SWIO region with the major powers in the era of the Indo-Pacific. Multilateral security will be a positive endeavour for these countries. With increased capabilities, the SIDS—acting under a multilateral institution and with a common voice—should engage with the major powers to secure their backyard and set their agenda on their terms as the geopolitical realities unfold, as IOC Secretary-General Vêlayoudom Marimoutou noted, “..because the ambitions and needs of our Member States have evolved, because our region must face up the globalisation of climatic, ecological, economic and health risks and fit into a wider space, that of Africa and also that of a vast Indo-Pacific continuum.”<sup>17</sup>



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Africa's role in the Indo-Pacific is neither defined nor clearly articulated, but it is a key component of that region. From an African perspective, three priorities have emerged. First, the growing militarisation and extensive foreign presence in the region is a source of tension for African countries and could have a destabilising impact. Second, since African waters are a significant maritime trade route, it is imperative for countries in the region to combat and tackle piracy and other transnational crimes. Third, ocean pollution (such as the dumping of toxic waste, oil spills, and emissions from ships along vital trade routes) is a cause for concern. These issues provide an opportunity for countries in the Indo-Pacific to cooperate on solutions. However, unless the African countries proactively articulate their priorities and interests, they will miss out on participating in the decision-making processes on maritime security issues.



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