OCEAN REGIONS IN AN ERA OF GLOBAL TRANSFORMATION

REPORT ON THE SECOND COLLOQUIUM

HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA AT THE JAVETT-UP ART CENTRE
20-21 NOVEMBER 2023

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

SABTT
South African
BRICS Think Tank

NATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR THE HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Ocean
Regions
Programme

PREFACE

The Ocean Regions Programme in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria hosted its second Ocean Regions colloquium,[1] *Ocean Regions in an Era of Global Transformation*, on 20-21 November 2023. The colloquium brought together academics, researchers and practitioners from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Mauritius, Cameroon, Rwanda, Brazil, India, Greece, Portugal, Australia and the UK to discuss, under the Chatham House Rule, approaches to and experiences in ocean region-making and governance with a specific focus on Africa's position, role and agency in an evolving oceanic landscape.

Both the Indo-Pacific and the South Atlantic are of political, economic and developmental concern to Africa, in particular to the littoral and island states of the continent. These ocean spaces also connect Africa to other states and communities in these evolving regions which are simultaneously attracting increasing attention from external actors in an era of geopolitical change and contestation. There is also the Southern Ocean, around the Antarctic continent, gaining in importance in the face of geopolitical shifts, climate change challenges and growing interest in its potentially rich energy and mineral resources.

The past several years have seen a dramatic and renewed interest in 'oceanic worlds/regions', most obvious of which are the maritime component of China's Belt and Road Initiative and the evolution of the Indo-Pacific region, often perceived as being driven by the US, Japan, India and Australia (the 'Quad') and largely external actors. Although African states, and more generally, regional organisations, still tend to be terra-centric, oceans are not merely fringes, boundaries and margins, confined to being lanes of transport and communication. Rather, we are witnessing the development of the 'century of the oceans' and, many would say, this development is driven by Sino-American power rivalry, though, concomitantly, issues of interdependence also come into play. Beyond the Indo-Pacific, big and medium powers (the US, China and India, in particular) are also turning to the Atlantic, historically part of the NATO sphere of influence, as a theatre of interest and attention, with the US having launched a Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation in September 2023, and in the Southern Ocean there is evidence of growing Russian involvement.

Ocean spaces are being redefined strategically in terms of maritime perimeters as a means to project power and protect interests beyond continental vicinities; ocean regions are being actively constructed, turning spaces into places through discursive region-building strategies. The Indian Ocean, sharing with the South Atlantic the status of an UN-declared Zone of Peace, is heavily militarised, and the Eastern Southern Atlantic, along the coast of West Africa, is experiencing a continued increase in piracy, maritime terrorism and so-called blue crimes, whilst the littoral states and islands of the Indo-Pacific suffer from climate change and a host of ocean-related threats, not least of which is that of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, in many instances perpetrated by major extra-regional powers.

Despite these transformative impacts of, and on, international relations, the ocean regions remain vital trading networks for the global economy, sources of coastal community livelihoods and critical sites for marine species breeding and migration. The proliferation of national strategies to promulgate the blue economy and potential conflicts over Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), including deep sea resource mining and its disruptive potential, pose significant governance challenges for ocean regions.

---

[1] A copy of the report of the first colloquium (2022) can be accessed here.

Overall, there is little doubt that the evolution of ocean regions will continue to be a top priority of great and emerging powers, as well as of littoral and island states and regional and international organisations. The African continent faces a notable challenge in this regard, as both the African Union and several of its member states are seeking to position themselves in the rapidly changing environment on their various maritime shores. These developments generate a range of questions which, for the purposes of the second colloquium on ocean regions, were framed as follows:

- What are the interests of the various internal and external actors?

- What do the recent strategy documents (and in many instances the updating of these strategies) towards the Indo-Pacific/Indian Ocean/South Atlantic entail?

- What are the issues driving ocean regionalisation and how is this regionalisation playing out?

- Are there grounds to promote cooperation between these two vast maritime spaces to foster bi-oceanic governance?

- Where does the Southern Ocean and its governance regime fit in?

- What are African positions on its maritime spaces?

- What role can the African Union and strategically located countries such as South Africa, Kenya and Mauritius play?

- Is there a role for BRICS and what impact will the expansion of BRICS have on the evolution of ocean regions?

- Can existing regional organisations contribute to the governance of these ocean spaces-turned-places?

- How can the different interests and positions in ocean regions (driven by political, economic, environmental and justice concerns) be reconciled?

The brief report on the colloquium follows the programme sequence, where presentations in the first five sessions served as catalysts for the rich deliberations of key issues over two days. The report was prepared by postgraduate students in the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria who served as rapporteurs at the colloquium — Mosebetsi Khobotlo, Adam Louw and Carika Middelberg — and was edited by Hanlie Griesel, with critical input from Dr Robin Blake, Daniela Marggraff and Prof. Maxi Schoeman, also from the Department of Political Sciences.

Cover image: Joel Vodell

Contents

Table of Figures

SESSION 1

The rise of ocean regions in the context of geopolitical change and competition

Chair: Prof. Christopher Isike (Acting Head of Department: University of Pretoria, Political Sciences)

Speakers: Prof. Chris Alden (Director: London School of Economic, IDEAS), Dr Fonteh Akum (Executive Director: Institute for Security Studies), Prof. Kostas Ifantis (Panteion University, Athens).

The first session of the colloquium discussed the rise of ocean regions in the context of geopolitical change and competition. Change, evolution, transition and transformation were the main undercurrents of the discussion, and speakers and participants called attention to certain facets of the incoming world order and the rise of ocean regions. This included: the need for new frameworks appropriate to a rapidly changing context and sea-aware international relations theory (IRT); the re-emergence of geopolitics as an ordering mechanism following the waning unipolar condition; the rise of China as an extension of Cold War tensions; questions about Africa's stake in the changing seascapes; and the ongoing relevance of international law.

The following questions framed the presentations and discussion:

- Why do we see a 'revolution' in ocean affairs, both from policy and academic perspectives?

- What are the drivers of the evolution of ocean regions?

- Who are the actors and where do concerns, challenges, competition and attempts at convergence play out?

- How does the move towards a multiplex world impact the evolution of ocean regions?

- What are the strategies of big powers and external actors to ocean regions, and how do these contrast with those of smaller actors within these regions?

- What are the main narratives underlying the rise of ocean regions, espoused by whom and for what purpose?

How did we get to where we are now?

The international order is in transition. A major driver of this global transformation in an ocean regions context — and certainly not limited to this context — is globalisation, both across the waves and beneath them. The accelerated rate of technological advances and innovations in the delivery of goods and communication, alongside the effects of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)[2], the newer emphases on marine ecosystems as environmental sanctuaries, and transnational security in terms of the exploitation of the high seas as sites for a multiplicity of illegal activities, have witnessed a new territoriality that necessitates — normatively and descriptively — a range of policy-related and academic interventions.

Today, changes in the landscape of the global order call emphatic attention to the growing role of the seascape. These changes include, *inter alia:*

- Technological and state capacity to operate increasingly in ocean regions.

---

[2] United Nations General Assembly. 1982. *Convention on the Law of the Sea*. Internet: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf Access: 7 December 2023.

- Shipping innovations effectively transforming globalisation, producing something in the order of a 70 thousand per cent efficiency increase in transportation by sea,[3] with distance ceasing to be a factor in trade competition and commerce.
- The proliferation of extremely complex issues with profound legal dimensions involving boundary disputes around claims to an extended continental shelf, particularly in the Arctic and the South China Sea.
- Economic and development opportunities for states and businesses to go beyond coastal regions, even beyond the continental shelf, to extract resources and to develop and exploit the 'blue economy'.
- Environmental concerns, the connectivity of the environment, climate change, rising seas, salinity of ocean waters, the scourge of plastic as a by-product of the carbon economy, and the depletion of fisheries resources.

All of these changes and more, in their interconnectedness, constitute the drivers of global transformation with respect to the rise of ocean regions. The new geopolitical contentions of this emerging era, moreover, are partly constituting and being constituted by these drivers of ocean change.

Classical geopolitics viewed oceans as crucial to imperial and power dynamics, emphasising the enduring influence of geography, the significance of the state, and the pursuit of self-sufficiency. In the late twentieth century, neorealism continued the state-centric approach, flowing into a post-Cold War era marked by unipolarity and US-led liberal internationalism. However, the erosion of this liberal order is evident in factors such as: US disillusionment; the emergence of authoritarian alternatives including China's partnership with Russia; and the growing influence of non-state actors, prompting the need for new frameworks to navigate the challenges undermining liberal hegemony.

The post-liberal order has been conceived by Amitav Acharya[4] as a multiplex world in which elements of the liberal international order continue to survive but are subsumed in a complex of crosscutting orders, generally regionally based: developmental concerns could come to overshadow those of trade; and the proliferation of regional and plurilateral agreements, private initiatives, and various forms of arrangements straddling many different and emerging actors make for what is no longer a state-centric world. In this multiplex world, a variety of actors contribute to the creation of the rules and tackle transnational issues of security, climate change, and human rights. This evolving context also calls into question the status of International Relations theory/ies (IRT), the roots of which lie in European expansion across the globe, not only for trade but also warfare and colonisation. In different terms, to stay relevant, IRT must capture elusive transnational security issues caused by climate change, international crime, piracy, and more, as well as build a new conceptual vocabulary around what can be called the 'terraqueous turn' and issues such as maritime political economy, sea-blindness, maritime geography, and a host more. Moreover, the development of IRT around the oceans revolution will likely be a matter of analytical and theoretical loyalties.

Familiarly new geopolitical contentions?

The onset of a multiplex world is not a guarantee of the disappearance of the US-led liberal international order. It will likely survive, albeit fragmented, decentred, and as one amongst several

---

[3] Jones, B. 2022. *To Rule the Waves: How Control of the World's Oceans Shapes the Fate of the Superpowers*. Simon and Schuster.

[4] Acharya, A. 2017. After liberal hegemony: The advent of a multiplex world order. *Ethics & international affairs*, 31(3): 271-285. doi: 10.1017/S089267941700020X

international orders, crisscrossing one another in the choreography of centripetal and centrifugal forces, pulling the world towards a central order and breaking up the systemic management of such an order. Multiplexity does not preclude — and, indeed suggests, when examining the rivalry between China and the US, in particular — the 'return' of geopolitics as an ordering system and the likelihood of multipolarity following the present waning unipolar interregnum. The ocean regions are the sites for all of this: an emerging multiplicity of actors; regional efforts to manage systemic instability and layered crises; the search for regional and global orders; and the movement away from state-based solutions. Of course, the suggestion that there will be a return to multipolarity does not equate to a suggestion that it will necessarily be stable.

Competition over the ocean regions is expected to exacerbate future geopolitical risks. While there are of course major differences, in many ways the current geopolitical landscape is an extension of that which existed during the Cold War, when the oceans were alive with competing superpower navies. The factors that cause the oceans as a geopolitical and geo-economic arena to grow include: the dramatic revolution in containerised bulk shipping from the 1970s onwards; the proliferation of boundary disputes involving oceans; the proliferation of new technologies; debates and disputes around the exploitation of maritime resources, risks to biodiversity, and sustainability; and the emergent geopolitics of old and new actors versus the US and the US Navy. The latter is a sign, perhaps, of the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces, and between the unipolar interregnum and the horizon of multipolarity captured by the onset of the multiplex.

The rise of China is particularly noteworthy. China's admission to the Arctic Council in 2013 and concomitant investment in icebreaking technology, the construction of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) base in Djibouti in 2017, and China's proximity to the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea all demonstrate the rise of China at sea. According to the most recent US Department of Defense report, the PLAN's battle force is expected to grow to 395 ships by 2025 and 435 ships by 2030.[5] The US Navy, on the other hand, remains the major player in town, enjoying at least twice the tonnage of the PLAN. And while the US Navy enjoys a long history of engagement in the Indo-Pacific and a critical advantage because of its size, this caters for an era of very strong competition with China, a tug of war that could evolve into something more dangerous. Arguably, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with its significant investments can provide some glimpse into China's intentions in the Indo-Pacific.

As a subplot to the main rivalry of China and the US, the Indian Ocean has become a growing area of contention between India and China, in particular due to the region's strategic position in global trade flows and natural resources, and, in general, competing actors and influences. This is while the battle for supremacy in the Indo-Pacific neighbourhood continues to involve South Korea, Japan, China, India and Australia, all of whom have boosted their naval power to secure access to vast resources of fish, oil and natural gas.

The future ocean economy is also impacted by emerging forces such as technological innovation and the proliferation of discussion and actions on the issue of sustainability. As older and emerging forces and actors increasingly contest over territory and resources in the oceans, competition over undersea cables, seabed mining, off-shore oil and gas exploitation, and wind power progressively mark the playing field.

---

[5] US Department of Defense. 2023. Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China, Annual Report to Congress. Internet: https://media.defense.gov/2023/Oct/19/2003323409/-1/-1/1/2023-MILITARY-AND-SECURITY-DEVELOPMENTS-INVOLVING-THE-PEOPLES-REPUBLIC-OF-CHINA.PDF. Access: 7 December 2023

A place for Africa in the oceans?

The role of Africa in this transition is of particular interest, given the sheer scale of its littoral zones, coupled with its poor share in global maritime trade and development more generally. From the perspective of applied policy research in Africa, evidence-based analysis should inform programmatic policies on the continent, especially those relating to African maritime security and the blue economy. However, Africa lags behind her counterparts, handling only one per cent of the global seaborne trade which transports 90 per cent of the world's goods. This points to the need for the African continent to ramp up investment in ports, carriers, and logistics in order to anchor its economies for future growth, particularly in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Agreement.

Complementarities between green and blue economies provide great advantages for Africa's economic and social development. The African Union's (AU) 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy[6] provides a regulatory framework at the AU level, and the Seychelles blue bond[7] is an example of an innovative financing instrument, combining public and private investment that can likely be replicated by African states in general, and her island states, in particular. However, amidst the challenges of over twenty African countries facing debt distress, the imperative for reforming the international financial system becomes evident and points to the need for a more inclusive and equitable framework that empowers African nations to take control of their financial and economic interests.

Africa is playing in a highly unequal field in maritime trading, while at the same time being vulnerable to different forms of maritime insecurity on both the Indian and Atlantic littoral flanks of the continent, such as piracy, and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Some global powers disregard the norms they purport to uphold and invest in illegal fishing in African waters. This raises the importance of UNCLOS, which remains one of the few public international law texts that, beyond its normative importance, has strong anti-hegemonic connotations. It is, moreover, the product of a wider and almost universal negotiation and debate and is not, as older texts invariably are, the product of the old colonialist-imperialist powers but of a more inclusive process. As such, it is worth protecting, albeit subject to power politics; there are those actors who will ignore the provisions of UNCLOS.

The importance and relevance of the law of the sea will always be circumscribed by balancing normative and power considerations. As practiced, the liberal international order has its shortcomings and demonstrates the role of power politics in that setting, but at the same time, change is demonstrably possible. As the case of the Chagos Islands illustrates, agency was — eventually — found by using some combination of moral persuasion and international law, and bolstering the argument in the context of the latter.[8] Thus, while the liberal international is deeply imperfect, it does allow for outcomes that push against this imperfection. Whether the coming multipolarity — not guaranteed but highly likely considering the above — would offer the same type of outcome is unclear.

Concluding remarks

In a holistic appraisal of the interconnected character of the high seas, islands, inlets and bays, and littoral regions of the globe, the search for appropriate frameworks must anticipate a growing complexity — in transformations, policy horizons, and academic debates and discussions — of the rise

---

[6] African Union. 2012. 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy, Version 1.0. Internet: https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/11151/2050_aims_srategy.pdf Access: 7 December 2023

[7] The World Bank. 2018. Seychelles launches World's First Sovereign Blue Bond, October 19. Internet: https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2018/10/29/seychelles-launches-worlds-first-sovereign-blue-bond Access: 7 December 2023

[8] See https://issafrica.org/iss-today/uk-seems-ready-to-return-its-last-african-colony Access: 7 December 2023.

of ocean regions. Emerging actors and alliances — not least BRICS+ — alongside traditional great powers, will play into this transition, and stability is by no means guaranteed. Africa will strive to find her sea legs, though existing challenges and inequalities are likely to constrain attempts in these regards. The status, usefulness and legitimacy of international law, too, will have to cope with changing circumstances.

In retrospect, it may be said that the interregnum of the unipolar condition — with no great historical antecedents — enabled the subsuming of what realists would argue are the usual tendencies of the push-and-pull of power politics by a much more consensus and rules-based economic domain. This system, now, is fragmenting. Like the ocean tides, waves of systemic perpetual crises, characterised by the choreography of centripetal and centrifugal forces, will shape globalisation in the multiplex world order. And the conclusion of this global transition may witness the rise of multipolarity *via* the drive for an ordering mechanism that produces the conditions for coexistence with and eventual evolution to a multipolar system.

Perhaps the role of the oceans and the rise of ocean regions in this time of global transformation and geopolitical change and competition mirror WB Yeats's depiction of "mere anarchy is loosed upon the world" and Chinua Achebe's assertion that "the centre cannot hold".

Key points
● The evolving global order underscores the pivotal role of the seascape, driven by technological advancements, shipping innovations, complex legal issues, economic opportunities, and environmental concerns, all shaping the geopolitical contentions of an emerging era centred around the rise of ocean regions.
● The ongoing erosion of US-led liberal internationalism is giving way to a multiplex world order, where emergent geopolitical contentions are likely to lead eventually to some sort of multipolarity, in which the drive towards stability and rules-based ordering will likely be subject to perpetual systemic crises.
● Intensifying ocean competition, reminiscent of the Cold War, poses heightened geopolitical risks, with factors such as technology advances, boundary disputes, maritime resource exploitation, biodiversity risks, and emerging geopolitical actors shaping the evolving landscape, notably in the context of the US-China rivalry.
● The effectiveness of the law of the sea hinges on balancing normative principles and power dynamics, as demonstrated by the imperfect yet changeable nature of the liberal international order; however, the outcome of such challenges in an emerging multipolar world is uncertain.
● Africa's coastal importance and underdeveloped maritime trade require evidence-based policies; however, challenges, including debt distress, highlight the urgent need for international financial system reform and the more inclusive empowerment of African nations.

SESSION 2

Human security concerns in the maritime domain

Chair: R Adm. Derek Christian (retired)

Speakers: Dhesigen Naidoo (Institute for Security Studies (ISS) and Presidential Climate Commission), Prof. Roukaya Kasenally (University of Mauritius), Raj Mohabeer (Indian Ocean Commission), Prof. Chris Nshimbi (South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI) Chair, University of Pretoria, Political Sciences)

The second session of the colloquium discussed human security concerns in the maritime domain. Speakers and participants in the main focused on the Indian Ocean region, both in its relation to Africa's eastern coastline and conceptions of the Indo-Pacific more broadly. The Western Indian Ocean region, in particular, enjoyed attention in respect of traditional and emerging security challenges and how these relate to developmental challenges and ongoing efforts at securitising the maritime domains of Africa and the island states in the Western Indian Ocean. Climate change was another hallmark of the deliberations, suggesting that any discussion around human security is circumscribed by climatic concerns. Lastly, the session raised the problematic framing of human security understood in terms of African migration, a reality that is increasingly exacerbated by the climate crisis.

The session was framed by four questions:

- What are the challenges?

- What is the impact of non-state actors, ranging from civil society organisations/ community-based organisations to transnational crime networks?

- How do existing institutions and regimes address these challenges efficiently?

- What is required to improve the human security concerns generated by geopolitical competition and the unbridled exploitation of marine resources?

A summary of the discussions is grouped under three themes: security challenges; climate change as the overarching threat; and the human in human security.

What are the security challenges at/under the sea?

Ongoing challenges to human security are present in the Western Indian Ocean maritime domain[9]. Some examples of these challenges include: terrorism, crime, a spill-over of the conflict in Yemen into the maritime domain, piracy, IUU fishing, drug, wildlife and timber smuggling, irregular migration and human trafficking. According to the Madagascar-based Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC), officially reported cases of these incidents are increasing year on year. A range of non-state actors — and some actors linked to powerful states — exploit this ocean region, with transnational criminal networks playing a prominent role in undermining human security. Moreover, these networks are not limited to the oceans and are a vital conduit for extending transnational crime into the landward domain.

Regarding maritime security challenges at the national level, and on the African continent, in particular, the challenges range from too many uncoordinated capacity building projects, weak

---

[9] Note that presentations in this session focused largely on the African side of the Indo-Pacific.

enforcement by maritime institutions, the legacy of colonialism, limited compliance with international conventions, inadequate national frameworks and siloed approaches, and sea-blindness with regard to development strategies, all of which makes for a limited capacity of EEZ safety and security. The situation of many countries in or land-linked to the Western Indian Ocean region, such as Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia, and the activities of transnational terrorist and criminal networks, do not favour an improvement of maritime security. Beyond these more traditional challenges, newer ones lurk below the waves.

The oceans are carriers of data, both above and, increasingly, below the waves. Undersea data cables make for another set of security challenges in the maritime domain. The geopolitical and geostrategic importance of underwater data transfer underscores the challenges in coming to terms with the growing role played by ocean regions in today's world. Knowledge-based economies are dependent on data and the technologies constituting the digital infrastructure that connect land and sea. Data chokepoints in the changing seascapes of ocean regions may eventually come to overlay onto existing maritime chokepoints, such as in the Indian Ocean, Bab el-Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Strait of Malacca, the latter already connecting to the Cape of Good Hope with the 13 500 kilometre South African Far East (SAFE) cable.

There is an emergent data chokepoint between Mauritius and Réunion, knotting together the SAFE, the Meltingpot Indianoceanic Submarine System (METISS), the Lower Indian Ocean Network (LION), and the Mauritius and Rodrigues Submarine Cable System (MARS) (see Figure 1 below). Indeed, 'data' in its material and discursive externalities and relationships, can be considered an academic and policy chokepoint in the context of the evolution of ocean regions. The importance of data and its digital transmission, particularly in today's world, raises concerns relating to mis- and disinformation, as well as the questions of sharp power and the weaponisation of data, data sovereignty beneath the waves, and vulnerabilities relating to human security.

Figure 1. Submarine data cables in the Indian Ocean[10]

Climate change as the overarching crisis?

The greatest threat to human security in general, stretching to truly planetary proportions, is that of climate change. The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), in its Sixth Assessment Report,[11] states that climate change has led to reduced food and water security globally, hindering efforts to meet the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The impact is evident in increased extreme heat events, mortality, and morbidity, along with rising instances of climate-related diseases. Widespread adverse effects and economic damages, particularly in climate-exposed sectors, have resulted in losses and damages that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations and urban areas, compromising human health, livelihoods, and infrastructure. Global warming already sits very near to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels which, it has been argued, suggests that previous efforts at diagnosing this global crisis must be revised, and that policies related to tackling climate change must follow suit.

The seven interconnected elements of security — economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political — outlined in the 1994 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

---

[10] Kasenally, R. and Dookhony, M. 2022. *New Players, New Ties in the Indian: A Win-Win Situation for Mauritius?* Mauritius: MSR Publications.

[11] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. 2023. Summary for Policymakers. In: *Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [Core Writing Team, H. Lee and J. Romero (eds.)]. IPCC: Geneva, Switzerland. pp. 1-34. doi: 10.59327/IPCC/AR6-9789291691647.001

report[12] that coined the term human security, categorise the long list of threats to human security. Climate change will exacerbate this range of threats as it acts as a threat multiplier, seed of conflict and insecurity, and, subsequently, as the fundamental base to human insecurity. In the oceans context, rapid sea level rise poses a significant global threat, particularly impacting island nations, while escalating ocean temperatures contribute to intensified storm events and disrupt marine ecosystems, leading to altered migration patterns and biodiversity loss. Additionally, ocean acidification impedes carbon sequestration, further exacerbating environmental challenges and compounding the risk of biodiversity decline. Even though a truncated description of the risks posed by climate change, it nevertheless demonstrates the near-apocalyptic status of this problem to human security at planetary scales.

Africa cannot rely on socioeconomic development revenue that would be generated from the continent's fossil fuel and mineral wealth, as well as its biodiversity, on land and in the oceans. Additionally, the export plan of the AU Agenda 2063 is undermined by carbon-related tariff barriers and other regulations impacting ocean transportation. Developing Africa's share in the blue economy, then, cannot assume a 'business as usual' approach. Another issue closely related to the issue of the oceans is migration. The 2021 Groundswell II report by the World Bank[13] (perhaps already-outdated) claims that the number of climate migrants could reach 216.1 million by 2050, of which 85.7 million and 19.3 million will be from Sub-Saharan and North Africa, respectively. Considering this, discourses around human security and migration deserve closer scrutiny.

Who are the humans in human security?

It is only recently that Africa is included in conversations about the Indo-Pacific, most probably as the result of references to the Asia-Pacific increasingly making way for references to the Indo-Pacific, and subsequently the gradual introduction of Africa into these discourses and policy perspectives.

While this is a welcome development — notable in recent policy documents coming out of Europe[14] — it nevertheless suggests that the 'Indo' of Indo-Pacific, from the Western perspective,[15] is blind to East Africa, despite the sheer scale of its littoral zone along the Western Indian Ocean. Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy,[16] for instance, counts forty countries as part of the Indo-Pacific — not one lies along the East African coast or even in the Western Indian Ocean region. Moreover, mention of African people tends to be entirely absent from policy documents on Indo-Pacific strategy and security concerns authored by the West.

There is a disjuncture between human mobility and migration, and security and securitisation concerning Africans, also in the context of the maritime domain. As a liberal concept, human security

---

[12] UNDP. 1994. Human Development Report 1994. Available at:
https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr1994encompletenostatspdf.pdf Access: 7 December 2023.

[13] Clement, Viviane, Kanta Kumari Rigaud, Alex de Sherbinin, Bryan Jones, Susana Adamo, Jacob Schewe, Nian Sadiq, and Elham Shabahat. 2021. *Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration*. Washington, DC: The World Bank.

[14] Grare, F. and Reuter, M. 2021. Moving Closer: European Views of the Indo-Pacific. European Council on Foreign Relations, September 2021. Internet: https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Moving-closer-European-views-of-the-Indo-Pacific.pdf Access: 7 December 2023.

[15] See the following relatively recent sources for the neglect of Africa in Western conceptions of the Indo-Pacific: [France] Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. 2022. France's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Internet: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf Access: 7 December 2023; [United States] The White House. 2022. Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States. Internet: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf Access: 7 December 2023.

[16] Government of Canada. 2022. Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy. Available at:
https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/indo-pacific-indo-pacifique/index.aspx?lang=eng Access: 7 December 2023.

focuses on the security of humans within a state. As such, human security is often conceived in state-centric terms. The New Regionalism Approach[17] to the construction of regions by state and non-state actors is particularly useful for understanding African regionalisation considering the latter's colonial stratification at the Berlin Conference[18] and *de facto* bottom-up regionalisation evident in the continent, particularly at border zones and increasingly across borders using maritime routes as passageways. When combined with climate migration, state borders become increasingly less meaningful, compounding ongoing porousness. Thus, there is a need to drive efforts at conceptualising human security in regional terms, without necessarily swopping out state-centrism for region-centrism.

This disjuncture is also evident in the empirical blindness regarding the safety and security of African migrants in the Mediterranean and Arabian peninsular regions. Securitisation approaches allow countries to secure their borders in the name of human security yet to neglect the actual safety and security — and indeed the human rights — of people coming out of Africa who are frequently fleeing life or death situations. The neglect of Africa and Africans by more powerful actors and regimes who promote liberal — that is, Western liberal humanitarian — conceptions of human security risks reproducing coloniality, which subsequently undermines future collaborative efforts and amplifies the wedges that persist from the colonial into the post-colonial era. In the context of the ocean regions, such dynamics trouble and constrain navigating the changing land– and seascapes of the incoming global order, particularly considering the projected figures around climate migration mentioned above.

It is alarming that some states to the north of the African continent consciously violate the rights of African migrants who attempt to enter their territories while, at the same time, promoting norms of interdependence and cooperation, including framing human rights as universal. It is, moreover, worthwhile to note the possibility that the ways in which countries treat African migrants reflect their attitudes to their fellow states on the African continent. In essence, the legitimacy of international norms and values is called into question when examining the treatment of Africans in the name of human security by actors to the north of the continent.

Concluding remarks

Human security challenges in the maritime domain range from more traditional to newer challenges. In the Western Indian Ocean, in particular, uncoordinated efforts in addressing maritime security challenges, including control over designated EEZs, have resulted in stagnation in the face of very real security and developmental issues. To mitigate against this, greater cooperation between national, regional and international bodies, as well as non-state actors broadly conceived, is required. The disjuncture between ostensibly universal conceptions of human security and the practice of the latter in state-centric and Eurocentric terms also undermines efforts to address security and developmental issues and foster regional cooperation. Climate change perhaps makes for the overarching concern in relation to human security in the maritime domain and extending to global proportions. It reminds us of the interrelatedness of human affairs, biodiversity, weather patterns, landmasses, and the oceans, suggesting the necessity for a planetary and relational ontology in undergirding academic and policy efforts to address any problems that may arise in the seven dimensions of human security.

---

[17] Hettne, B. and Söderbaum, F.1998. The new regionalism approach. *Politeia*, 17(3): 6-21.

[18] Adebajo, A. 2005. The curse of Berlin: Africa's security dilemmas. *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft*, 4: 83-98.

Key points

- Maritime security challenges in Africa — exacerbated by uncoordinated capacity building, weak enforcement, historical legacies, limited compliance with international conventions, inadequate frameworks, and siloed approaches — contribute to a constrained capacity for EEZ safety and security. This is further complicated by emerging threats and the destabilising influences of neighbouring countries in the Western Indian Ocean region.

- Undersea data cables pose significant security challenges in the maritime domain, emphasising the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of underwater data transfer amid a world in transition, where knowledge-based economies rely on digital infrastructure connecting land and sea, leading to concerns about mis- and disinformation, sharp power, weaponisation of data, data sovereignty beneath the waves, and human security vulnerabilities.

- Climate change acts as a threat multiplier and a fundamental base-level challenge to the seven interconnected dimensions of human security, posing a near-apocalyptic challenge to human security at planetary proportions.

- In light of challenges such as carbon-related tariff barriers and regulations affecting ocean transportation, Africa cannot depend on revenue from fossil fuels, minerals, and biodiversity for socioeconomic development. The potential impact of human migration linked to climate change highlights the need for a re-evaluation of development strategies, particularly in the context of the blue economy and its implications for human security.

- The recent inclusion of Africa in discussions about the Indo-Pacific, particularly in policy documents from Europe, signifies a positive shift, yet reveals a Western perspective that overlooks East Africa's extensive littoral zone and the human security of African people in Western-authored Indo-Pacific strategy and security documents.

- The gap between human security and Western securitisation endeavours highlights the importance of moving beyond state-centric interpretations of human security and embracing genuinely human-centred securitisation and development initiatives, particularly in the context of how Africans are treated.

SESSION 3

BRICS (BRICS+) in the maritime context

Chair: Dr Yu-Shan Wu (University of Pretoria, Political Sciences)

Speakers: Prof. Francois Vreÿ (Stellenbosch University), Priyal Singh (Institute for Security Studies), Prof. Carlos Milani (State University of Rio de Janeiro).

While BRICS undoubtedly has political and economic underpinnings, it is unavoidable that the maritime context will have to be taken into consideration when formulating policies and strategies as

> *"[t]he oceans are a great laboratory for the making of a new world order, based on new forms of international cooperation and organization, on a new economic theory, on a new philosophy." Elisabeth Mann Borgese[19]*

The aim of the session was to explore BRICS and a future expanded BRICS+ within a maritime context, which was framed by the following questions:

- Is BRICS bigger than the sum-total of its members?

- Is BRICS focused on the maritime domain?

- How do BRICS members display — and manage — competition in the ocean regions?

- Is there a role for BRICS as a group in the maritime domain?

- Will BRICS expansion have an impact on the group's involvement in oceans governance?

- What role for South Africa as (now) one of the African members of BRICS?

Three thematic areas emerged in response to the questions and in discussions:

- The substance of BRICS and its relevance in the current and future international order.

- The maritime context of BRICS.

- The accelerators and impediments to the maritime context of BRICS and BRICS+.

The substance of BRICS and its relevance

While BRICS was established to give a collective voice to the Global South that is confronted by an international order which is deemed unbalanced, unrepresentative, and unsustainable, it is the current and future membership of the organisation that raises four issues related to the substance of BRICS and its relevance in the contemporary and future international order. Firstly, the pivotal role played by China is crucial to the relevance of BRICS. As one commentator observed, "Chinese leadership is key … it is not possible to think of a group of this magnitude without Chinese leadership." However, the motivation behind China's membership of BRICS should be questioned, particularly in terms of its foreign policy. Secondly, claims that the heterogeneity of BRICS is likely to impede its functionality in the international order are unfounded as most international institutions are characterised by heterogeneity, for example, the at times divisive role played by Turkey in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) demonstrates just this. Yet NATO works around it and continues

---

[19] Ashworth, L.M. 2023. "Mother of the Oceans": Maritime Governance as a Template for a New Global Order in the International Thought of Elisabeth Mann Borgese (1918-2002). *Global Studies Quarterly*, 3:1.

to function. BRICS can do the same. Thirdly, while BRICS membership is currently restricted to five countries, it is the envisaged expansion after 2025 that has elicited speculation, especially regarding membership criteria. Indeed, BRICS has not — or it is reluctant to — clearly articulate what the criteria are and it appears to have adopted an ad-hoc approach when considering applications. The motivation behind the decision to accord membership to Saudi Arabia was specifically highlighted as it raises questions regarding transparency. As noted by one commentator, opposition to a Western-dominated international order is an insufficient motivation and more needs to be done to clarify the acceptance conditions and standards to promote unity and a common purpose. Finally, the domestic politics of member states cannot be discounted as it is domestic contexts that will ultimately dictate member states' world views, preferences, interests, and ultimately their role and participation in the organisation.

The maritime context of BRICS

Against the backdrop of Figure 2, which provides the macro context of the world's oceanic regions (see below), there are three ways to conceptualise the oceans that may serve to frame the maritime context of BRICS: The first is a realist conception where states maximise the use of the oceans to protect and project their territorial and geopolitical interests that include, but are not limited to, the protection and exploitation of marine resources, the protection of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and the countering of terrorism and piracy. The second is a liberalist conception where the oceans function as a support system for social and economic development with a particular focus on the promotion and advancement of trade. The third conception is to view the oceans as a component of a planetary ecosystem.[20] Entangled with the land and the earth's atmosphere, the oceans are a planetary sub-system and are the objects of human interference, requiring regulation to mitigate threats and to exploit opportunities inherent in the ecosystem and its sub-systems.

---

[20] An ecosystem is an 'ecological web'. Eliminating one component of the web leads to the collapse of the entire system as all components are reliant on the other for their survival (Steans, et al. 2013. *An Introduction to International Relations Theory: Perspectives and Themes*. Third Edition. London and New York: Routledge)
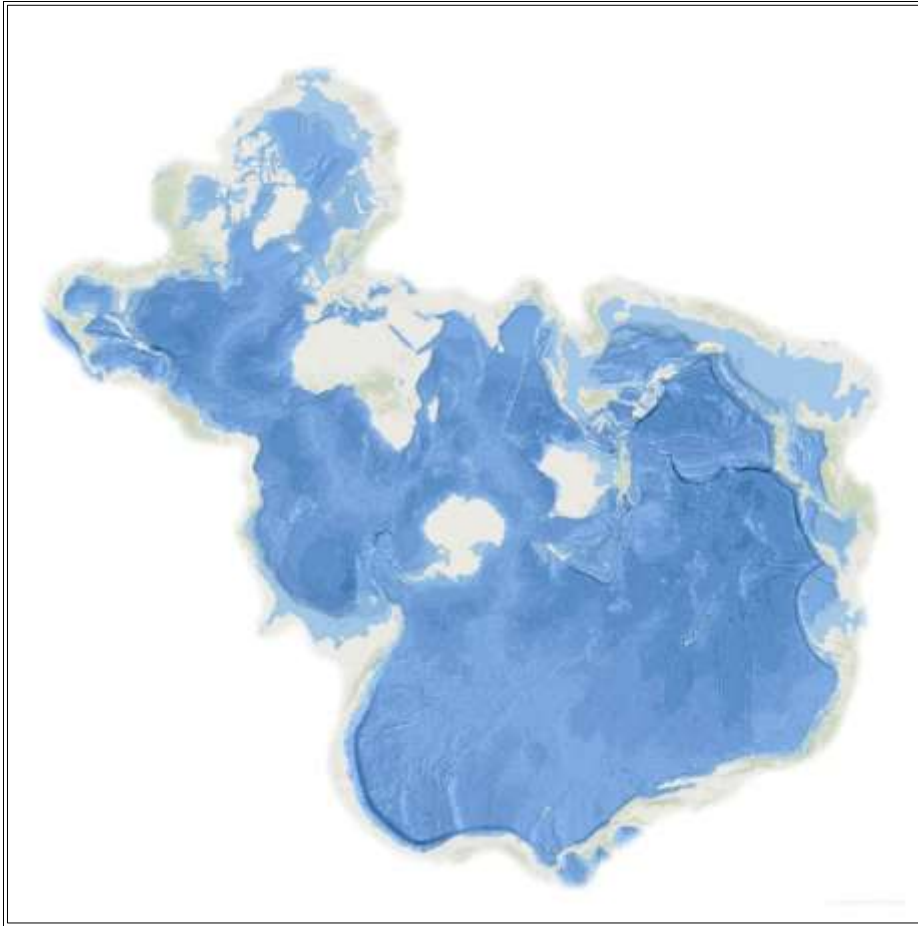
Figure 2. Macro perspective of the world's oceans[21]

Although all member countries have national maritime agendas[22], there is little declaratory evidence of a BRICS approach to the maritime context.[23] Moreover, BRICS has not institutionalised a maritime working group and it was pointed out that there are currently elements of sea-blindness regarding the maritime context of BRICS. In addition, it was highlighted that, despite attempts to include the maritime domain in the joint statement issued at the conclusion of 2023 BRICS Summit,[24] it was omitted because the "member states could not agree [on the substance]". However, the ratification of UNCLOS by member states points to the vestiges of commonality of purpose regarding the maritime context of BRICS, as do India, Brazil and South Africa's maritime exercises (IBSAMAR).[25]

A future BRICS maritime context depends on whether the organisation focuses on a developmental economic agenda or moves towards an agenda that has a maritime component that will either follow

---

[21] The Spilhaus "World Ocean in a Square" is a map that depicts the world's oceans as a single body of water — their true configuration. Suitable for small scale visualisations of oceanic systems, this map provides a captivating visual framework for purposes that would benefit from revealing our planet's marine environment. Internet: https://nation.maps.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=9b2ce7c8179b4744af7bf3ddb86b7804 Downloaded: 21 December 2023.

[22] National maritime agendas are focused on specific oceanic regions. For example, India is largely concerned with the Indian Ocean Region (IOR); China with the IOR, South China Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean; Brazil with the South Atlantic.

[23] See Mudimeli, U.M. 2023. BRICS in the Maritime Domain. University of Pretoria, Department of Political Sciences. Unpublished scoping review.

[24] Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations Cape Town, South Africa 1 June 2023. Internet: https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Joint-Statement-BRICS-MFA-1-June_2023.pdf Downloaded: 21 December 2023.

[25] Inaugurated in 2008, IBSAMAR is a multinational naval exercise involving the navies of India, Brazil and South Africa. It has mostly been conducted in South African territorial waters due to the centrality of the country's geographical location.

non-traditional[26] or traditional[27] security approaches. Non-traditional approaches to maritime security hold the most promise as it encourages cooperation and collaboration while traditional approaches are likely to result in competition and conflict.

Considering that BRICS countries are geographically dispersed, the only element which physically connects this diverse group is the oceans. Also, the traditional and non-traditional maritime security threats effecting the BRICS countries make the maritime domain relevant to the grouping. Therefore, there is space for BRICS to establish a maritime agenda under the rubric of oceans governance that addresses the following domains: economic cooperation, maritime governance, traditional security matters, common international maritime issues, capacity building for/and technology transfer, and combating the impact of climate change.

The accelerators and impediments to the maritime context of BRICS and BRICS+

Accelerators that will assist in carving out a tangible maritime and mutually acceptable context for BRICS and BRICS+ are as follows: Firstly, the institution grows bigger than the sum of its parts; that is, BRICS/BRICS+ develops a clear institutional focus on maritime issues. Secondly, there are identifiable commonalities such as the promotion of the blue economy, the safeguarding of SLOCS, the institutionalising of cooperative maritime governance, and the identification of common values, interests, and culture. Thirdly, a focus on non-traditional security approaches and interests is likely to encourage cooperation and coordination that is centred on economic development with maritime characteristics. Finally, the inculcation of an institutional identity characterised by multiplicity[28] which offers a mechanism for coping with diversity in terms of roles by allowing members to 'wear different hats'.

Impediments that will hamper a mutually acceptable maritime context are, in turn, as follows: Firstly, there is the thorny issue of an expanded membership. While it has been possible for the current member countries to justify their involvement and role, the absence of formalised criteria could lead to a dilution of a future purpose. Moreover, admitting members with disparate world views and ideological orientations, dissimilar constitutional dispensations, incompatible national security values, interests, power, and identity — to name but a few — may lead to asymmetrical dynamics within the institution itself. Secondly, there is an ever-present danger that competition and rivalry between states may enter the multilateral arena that BRICS and BRICS+ purports to promote. Of particular concern is the tense relationship between China and India that is underpinned by geopolitical rivalry[29] which cannot be ignored. Thirdly, there is an incongruence in the membership of BRICS and the New Development Bank (NDB). However, more concerning is the absence of an NDB agenda or vision for the ocean regions; it only has a list of exclusions indicating what social or environmental projects and movements it is not allowed to fund. Fourthly, a BRICS+ runs the risk of perpetuating the inequalities contained in the current institutional arrangements. For example, the five 'permanent' members hold a 55% sway in decision-making, leading to the few dominating the many (as it grows its membership) and, in this way, the injustices of the present global order are perpetuated. Finally, a focus on

---

[26] Non-traditional approaches include, amongst others, mitigating the effects of climate change on the oceans and countering the effects of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing.

[27] Traditional approaches are mostly vested in the use of military power to protect and project a state's national interests in the maritime domain.

[28] For an exposition on multiplicity in identity, see the work of Goff, P.M. & Dunn, K.C. (eds). 2004. *Identity and Global Politics: Empirical and Theoretical Elaborations*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

[29] See, for example: Torode, G. 2023. Why the Indian Ocean Could be China's Archilles Heel in a Taiwan War, 15 December 2023. Internet: *https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/why-indian-ocean-could-be-chinas-achilles-heel-taiwan-war-2023-12-14/*. Access: 21 December 2023.

traditional security approaches and interests is likely to incite competition and tension between member states.

Concluding remarks

As an institution, BRICS and BRICS+ is under-theorised, under-conceptualised and non-operationalised in the maritime domain. While it may be argued that the institution and its members were and are pre-occupied with more pressing issues,[30] it is inevitable that the maritime dimension will eventually enter the structural, policy and strategic calculus of the institution. As the point of departure for a pathway into the future, it will be important for BRICS members to agree and articulate its substance as a prerequisite for articulating its current and future relevance in the international order. This will thereupon provide a platform for engaging with the maritime domain by emphasising coordination and collaboration over competition and conflict. Not to be excluded are the factors assisting or inhibiting the current and future context of the group's policies and strategies regarding the maritime domain. In this way, credence will be given to Borgese's claim that the oceans are, indeed, a laboratory for international cooperation and organisation.

Key points

- The substance of BRICS and its foreseen role in the international order is fluid and has not stabilised. Linked to this instability and change is the lack of clarity on the criteria for admitting states to an expanded BRICS.

- BRICS has not yet theorised, conceptualised, formalised or instutionalised a coherent and cogent approach to the maritime domain in preparation for its expansion to BRICS+. It is unavoidable and inevitable that the maritime domain will have to be brought into the BRICS+ agenda, and this will require clearly identifying policies and strategies.

- The accelerators that will advance a BRICS+ agenda in the maritime domain include: traditional measures such as the extension of membership, and focusing on maritime commonalities in the policies and strategies of member states; and non-traditional security approaches underpinned by economic development, and the inculcation of an institutional identity that promotes multiplicity.

- The impediments that may hamper the advancement of a BRICS+ agenda in the maritime domain are: the opaque membership criteria; competition and rivalry between member states; the absence of tangible economic support by the NDB for activities in the maritime domain; a perpetuation of inequality and domination by the 'permanent' BRICS member states; and a focus on traditional security approaches.

- Concerning South Africa's role within the maritime context of BRICS, Operation Phakisa underpins the blue economy and remains the most viable approach as it resonates with the BRICS maritime agenda.

---

[30] Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and International Relations Cape Town, South Africa 1 June 2023. Internet: https://brics2023.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Joint-Statement-BRICS-MFA-1-June_2023.pdf. Access: 21 December 2023.

Africa's role and position in maritime/ocean regions

Chair: Prof. Andrew Dorman (King's College London)

Speakers: Pavlos Petidis (Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens), Prof. David Mickler (Curtin University, Australia), Prof. Licinea Simão (University of Coimbra), Cdr. Adhijit Singh (Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi).

The fourth session of the colloquium aimed to illuminate how Africa's role and position in relation to the oceans is perceived by external actors. There are a number of reasons that call for a closer examination of Africa, including its role as an important geopolitical player with respect to security, also related to the occurrence of various illegal activities such as piracy and drug trading off the continent's coasts. Considering this evolving context, Africa's position on maritime security is important to big powers such as China and the US, as well as the European Union (EU) as a regional organisation. Global trading routes also impact on Africa's position in ocean regions, as it provides important connections between the Indian and Atlantic Oceans and the Mediterranean Sea, all of which are vital to the functioning of a global economy. However, not all big powers give the same priority to Africa, with Africa noticeably absent in the strategic documents of some states.

With this context in mind, the fourth session was framed by the following questions:

- How is Africa perceived by other powerful actors within evolving ocean regions?

- What areas of and vehicles for cooperation exist?

- How does the move towards a [multiplex](#) world impact the evolution of ocean regions?

- What are the strategies of big powers and external actors towards ocean regions, and how do these contrast with those of smaller actors within these regions?

- The exclusion of African interests in the region/s.

In essence, the presentations and discussion that followed can be summarised under three broad themes: Africa's inclusion/exclusion in evolving ocean regions; the reasons for different positions; and the Indo-Pacific as a containment strategy or an avenue for cooperation.

Africa's inclusion or exclusion in evolving ocean regions

There are three ways in which Africa is perceived by powerful external actors in evolving ocean regions: Africa is viewed as a pivotal partner, which is evident in India's perception of Africa; Africa is excluded, such as in the case of Australia; or conversely, Africa is 'somewhere in between', as is illustrated in the case of the European Union. Below, each position is briefly considered.

Africa 'in'

India is one state that includes the African continent, especially in its Indo-Pacific strategy. An element that has found particular resonance with India is the African humanist philosophy of Ubuntu, 'I am because we are'. It was pointed out that this not only emphasises a sense of community but can also be used as a framing device across navies and nations worldwide to highlight the need for cooperative action. For India, the need for cooperation is one element that drives its engagement with Africa; and further, that maritime security needs to be viewed as holistic, as opposed to only concerned with

conflict between navies. It needs to extend to the security of people and the blue economy. Along with these considerations, India views African states' thinking as increasingly centrifugal — they are becoming more aware of the maritime environment and the connection with developmental needs. This reality further motivates India's engagement with Africa.

However, it was pointed out that while Africa has made strides in how it views the oceans, it does not yet show agency, or the means and capacity to harness the potential of the oceans. It is here where India envisions its role to be, as a partner to the African continent. Expressed in different terms, India's foreign policy strives to partner with Africa in ways that strengthens solidarity, with initiatives led by Africa's needs. This is evident, for example, in India's involvement, since 2020, in the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), and its joining the Djibouti Code of Conduct, in 2019, both in observer capacities to enhance maritime security in the Indian Ocean region. In these respects, and in relation to the Indo-Pacific region (discussed below), India has positioned itself as a partner that aims to break the mold of dependency which has often defined Africa's relations with other external states and partners.

Africa 'out'

In contrast to India, Australia is an example of a state that has yet to include Africa in its strategic thinking of the Indo-Pacific. Figure 3 below shows, for example, the Indo-Pacific region, as viewed by the Australian government, and the complete omission of the African continent. Historically Australia has opted to maintain its foreign policy focus on the Pacific Ocean and Asian countries, shoring up relations with states such as Japan and Korea, as well as Western countries such as the US and UK. The extent of Africa's omission from Australia's thinking is none the more evident by the fact that in its 2023 International Development Policy,[31] only one reference was made to Africa. Furthermore, the only point of entry Australia has with Africa is through the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).

---

[31] Australian Government. 2023. Australia's International Development Policy For A Peaceful, Stable And Prosperous Indo-Pacific. *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.*
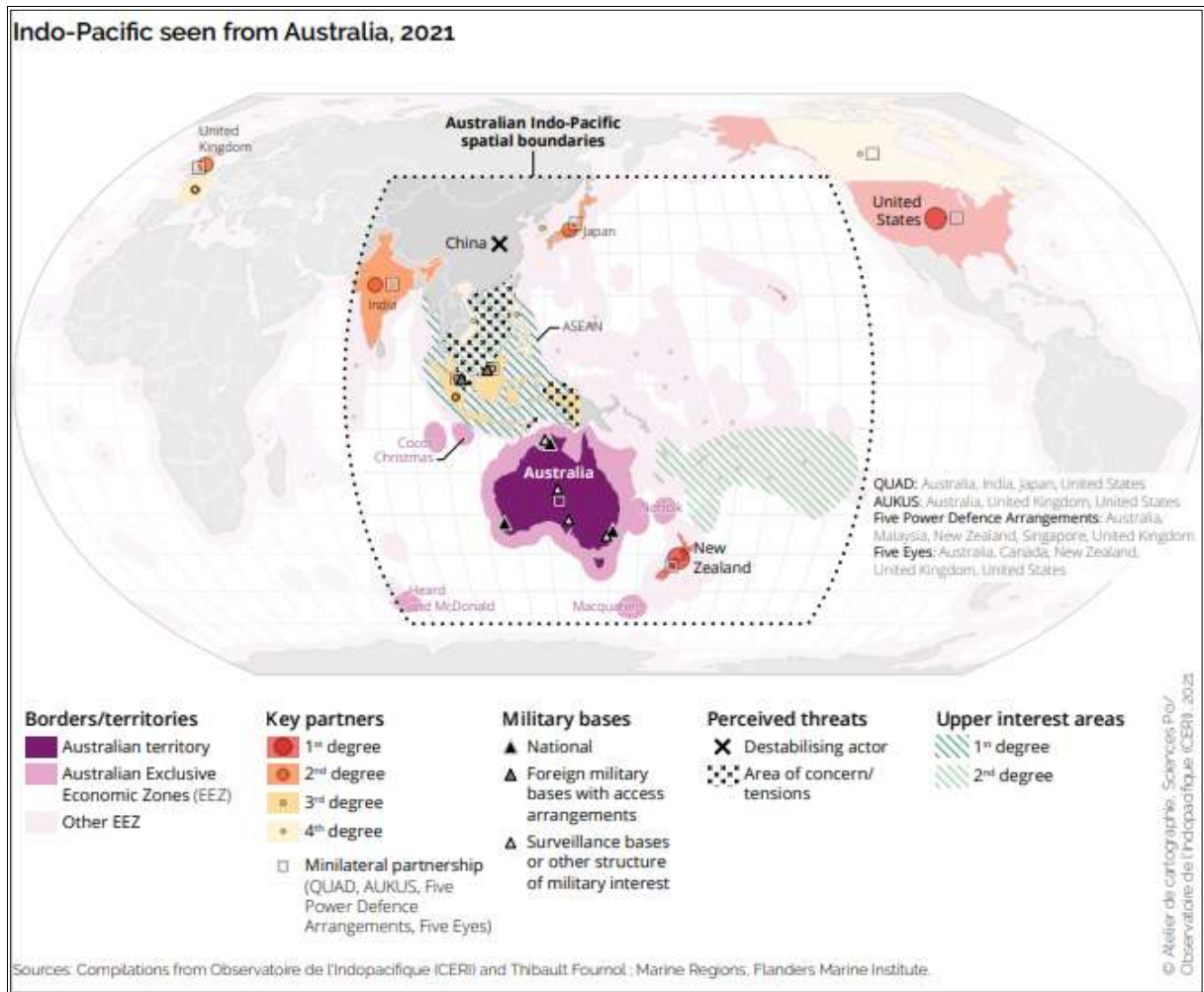
Figure 3. The Indo-Pacific according to Australian policy-makers[32]

Africa neither included nor excluded

While India pays much attention to Africa in relation to oceanic connections, and Australia almost none, the EU's involvement with Africa in the Indo-Pacific falls somewhere in between.[33] When piracy was at its peak, Africa gained much attention from the EU, with significant investments made to stop piracy because of the threat to maritime security and the impact on trade. Various EU-led initiatives in the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR) led to the eventual decrease in piracy. However, with the decrease, Africa slipped from the attention of EU policy-makers, as is demonstrated in the EU not updating their policies with respect to illegal activities in the waters around the continent.

Although the EU has kept strategic infrastructure investment in mind when it comes to Africa — such as investing in ports, electricity interconnections, and data transmission lines — these investments have been met with some skepticism as they are often seen as a measure of control. In different terms, such investments are viewed as political strategies for the benefit of more powerful actors and used

---

[32]   Observatory Indo-Pacific. 2021. Geography: Australia's cartographic imagination. Internet: https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceri/observatory-indo-pacific/australia/. Access: 15 December 2023.

[33] Here it is important to note that while the EU itself, as a collective entity, has an Indo-Pacific strategy, individual members, such as Germany, France and the Netherlands also have their own strategies for the Indo-Pacific. Within these respective strategies, there are slight nuances. France, for example, unambiguously refers to the Western shores of the Indian Ocean because it has territories in these regions and envisions a role for itself as a regional power. Meanwhile, the German and Dutch strategies adopt a different approach, rather defining security in terms of commercial activities.

to play African countries off against one another. Furthermore, infrastructure investment is seen as a threat to the environment — the infrastructure itself might have a negative impact on ecological systems, or funding for infrastructure might divert already limited investment away from environmental causes. In these respects, it was noted that while the EU may explicitly mention the continent in its strategies, it concedes little agency to African actors. The question of how Euro-African collaboration could look like in the Indo-Pacific remains unclear.

Why are African interests often excluded in the ocean regions?

The second broad thematic area in the discussions was why African interests are often left out of ocean regions or geopolitical considerations. While this vacuum might be for various reasons, one clear reason was that this could be attributed to historical forces. Colonialism created the dynamic where the African continent was considered an unequal trading partner. This, in turn, created dependencies on trading partners and the consequent dependency view of Africa. Further, the continent's disengagement with ocean regions has created the perception of a power vacuum. It has often been said that interests need to be seen as extending on a land-ocean continuum; that is, the interests of a state do not end with the borders of the terrestrial but extend into the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the state. However, apart from the fact that African states often lack the capacity to monitor their EEZs, it was suggested that it is the ocean beyond the EEZ — the high seas — where the real power vacuum has existed and where big powers come into play. The concern of China filling this vacuum was expressed, and of the US actively trying to counter Chinese influence. This geopolitical conflict in ocean regions has created a situation where African interests are often excluded.

A further reason why African interests are often excluded relates to external actors not always knowing or understanding how best to engage effectively with Africa. Apart from the fact that Africa consists of 55 states, there are also multiple different organisations that each have their own understanding of what security is and how it should be achieved. Along with this complexity, there are even further diversity and divisions within Africa — for example, there are countries with an abundance of natural resources, others without such resources; and there are different identities and languages — for example, a West African identity, a South Atlantic identity, and so forth; and anglophone, francophone, lusophone countries and many indigenous languages, factors that all point to a highly diverse continent and to the barriers this diversity may pose for engagement.

Within this context, it was suggested that one possible way to motivate for the inclusion of Africa's interests is to adopt an ecological perspective of maritime security, which would mean that the maritime domains must be understood as systems, and that all maritime phenomena, policies, and actors are part of an ecosystem. Therefore, for the US, China, the EU, or any other country or regional organisation to effectively solve or combat issues, it is necessary to understand Africa's role and how its agency will affect the continent. For example, if the EU wants to address criminal activities such as IUU fishing, it will need to understand why this is happening in the first place: is it owing to a lack of food security, or a lack of regulation, or both? Furthermore, a deeper understanding is necessary, such as considering how those responsible for IUU fishing respond to new military and law enforcements and the impact on local communities. In this way, an understanding of ocean regions as ecological systems would lead to realist-informed perspectives and evidence-based policy formulation.

In the case of Australia, specifically, it would need to 'decolonise' its understanding of the African continent so that it is able to see the importance of Africa to its security in ocean regions. The fact that both African countries and Australia have seats at IORA is one practical way in which dialogue can be facilitated. Additionally, non-traditional forms of diplomacy — such as academic diplomacy — could

aid in 'decolonising' Australia's view of Africa; for instance, academic diplomacy can change the views of scholars from both continents and university networks can contribute to building better relationships.

The Indo-Pacific: containment strategy or avenue for cooperation?

The third theme and dominant discussion point that emerged was whether it is possible to conceive of the Indo-Pacific as a zone of cooperation, or necessarily as a zone to contain China. From an Australian perspective, it was noted that Australia has not typically viewed the region as one of cooperation. Rather, it has been viewed as a struggle to ensure that conflict does not break out, and that it was worth highlighting the paradox in this position: Traditionally, Australia has been plagued by what it has coined the 'tyranny of distance'; as a western or northern state, it finds itself in the South, geographically far removed from its historical ties. At the same time, this tyranny could be perceived as an advantage since it is not easy to invade the Australian continent. However, with China increasing its influence in the Pacific Islands, this potentially allows this growing superpower to use the islands for military purposes. The situation is further complicated by the fact that while posing a security threat to Australia, China is Australia's largest trading partner, which has resulted in a paradox where Australia is using the money generated from trade with their largest trading partner to buy submarines to protect itself against this superpower. In this sense, the Indo-Pacific is mostly a 'theatre for security concerns' for Australia, as opposed to being an opportunity for cooperation.

This rather dim view of cooperation in the region was echoed by another participant who commented that it is near impossible for Europe to engage with China in a manner that is not strictly geopolitical, since Europe is constrained by its allies, particularly the US who has expressed no desire for constructive engagement. While India's perspective also highlighted concerns about China, specifically the 'debt traps' that China has been accused of using, it does not see the Indo-Pacific as a region to contain China, but rather as a zone of cooperation and an inclusive space for engagement by any state that wishes to be a reliable partner.

Concluding remarks

How Africa's role is viewed in relation to the Indo-Pacific is largely dependent on which external power is consulted. While India envisions a pivotal role for Africa and is ready to engage with Africa on the continent's own terms, other countries, such as Australia, and regional organisations, such as the EU, have a less clear image of Africa's role in ocean regions.

Ultimately, however, excluding Africa from the Indo-Pacific would be at the peril of the external actors, as there cannot be a free, open and stable Indo-Pacific while the Western Indian Ocean is a zone of instability. Considering the connected nature of the oceans, insecurity in one area which easily flows into insecurity of another. It is therefore vital that the Western perimeter of the Indo-Pacific extends to include Africa. Further, when considering the oceans, it is of crucial importance that an ecological approach is adopted that recognises the highly interdependent nature of maritime security. Finally, if ocean governance in the continent's waters were to be improved, African countries would need to establish their own independent agenda for maritime interests.

Key points

- Africa has become a significant geopolitical player in maritime security due to factors such as piracy, drug trading, and illicit activities off its coastal regions. However, Indo-Pacific strategies give differing weight to the importance of Africa, with some excluding Africa while others see Africa as a central partner. Therefore, there is contention as to whether Africa is viewed as a player, partner or merely as a pawn.

- The power vacuum that exists beyond the EEZ of states opens the possibility for geopolitical conflicts — particularly between China and the US — which consequently sideline African interests in ocean regions.

- Excluding Africa from maritime considerations poses risks to the overall stability of the broader ocean regions. This becomes especially apparent when viewing the oceans through an ecological lens, which emphasises the interdependent nature of maritime phenomena, policies and actors.

- The perception of whether the Indo-Pacific is viewed as a zone of cooperation or containment/conflict varies amongst external actors with most actors viewing the region primarily as a theatre for security concerns, as opposed to constructive cooperation and engagement.

- If ocean governance in the continent's waters were to be improved, African countries would need to establish their own independent agenda for maritime interests.

SESSION 5

African perspectives of maritime domain governance

Chair: Jaimal Anand (University of Pretoria and Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO))

Speakers: Dr Oscar Otele (University of Nairobi), Prof. Oscar Mwangi (University of Rwanda), Dr Samuel Oyewole (University of Pretoria), Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (SAIIA), Capt. Atonfack Goumou (Cameroon).

The penultimate session of the colloquium honed in on African perspectives of maritime governance. Several topics were discussed, ranging from theoretical perspectives on maritime security, to tracing the views and practices in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial times. Africa's maritime history reveals a far from simple relationship with its coastal waters, invariably with relationships influenced by the ebb and flow of external actors. Alongside a brief history, Africa's experiences in the Southwest Atlantic, the Southern Ocean, and the Gulf of Guinea were also the subjects of focus, while the case of Kenya was used to demonstrate how actors can build their maritime management and security capabilities. The discussion spoke to the potential agency that Africa can display in the maritime domain, which too often has been hampered by a plethora of security issues. In light of this, the session was framed by the following questions:

- How is Africa navigating the evolution of ocean regions?

- What agency does Africa and individual states have in determining the governance of ocean regions?

- What is the role of organisations such as the AU, the individual regional economic committees (RECs), and other regional formations such as IORA?

- How do actors build their maritime management and security capabilities?

- How do African littoral and island states position themselves vis-à-vis the interests of big actors?

Tracing Africa's experience to precolonial times

In order to consider how Africa has navigated the evolution of the ocean regions in contemporary times, it is necessary first to trace views and experiences to pre-colonial times, especially in the South-West Atlantic. A context was sketched of an era before European settlers when landlocked African states had limited contact with coastal areas and approached ocean governance from a metaphysical perspective, intertwining it with spirituality and rituals. The ocean, during this period, may have been perceived as a potential threat, which would have led to avoidance strategies. As a result, there were limited trade activities, and security threats posed by the ocean would have been largely unknown.

During the colonial period, major shifts occurred as European powers played a dominant role in shaping ocean governance through the mechanisms of imperialism and colonialism. African societies found themselves subjected to foreign rule, and faced threats that included gunboat and coercive diplomacy, in addition to natural disasters and invasions. Maritime security threats expanded to encompass piracy, human trafficking, and the imposition of strict trade regulations by colonial powers. During this time, there was also a division between European colonial powers who assumed control,

and the African people and their territories; the ocean provided passageways for colonial powers to conquer territories, and Africa was subjected to foreign power politics and the spill-over of their wars.

In the post-colonial period, maritime governance in African states has evolved to include three dimensions: the local, the regional, and the transnational. At the regional level, organisations such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) have become active in maritime governance. At the transnational level, external actors — the US, China, India and the EU, in particular — have taken an interest in the Africa region. Maritime security threats have now extended to include, beyond piracy, human and arms trafficking, and the dumping of toxic materials. Although these all pose a massive threat to maritime and human security, it was noted that the most significant challenge facing Africa today is weak institutional and systemic capacity. Even if states subscribe to laws, limited maritime capacity means that individual states, and Africa as a continent, are severely constrained in actually enforcing these laws and regulations. The lack of critical capacity, or the limited degree to which developing this capacity has taken place, is in itself a threat to maritime security, along with inter-agency conflict. Apart from particular challenges, the case of Kenya (discussed below) illustrates how Africa can embrace maritime security.

Kenya as case study — a perspective on maritime governance

Kenya, as a gateway to several landlocked countries in Eastern Africa and the Greater Horn of Africa, demonstrates ways in which maritime management and security capabilities can be developed, and the importance of maritime governance. Landlocked countries need and have an inherent right to access the sea, therefore the importance of the efficiency with which littoral states can ensure maritime security. Kenya has emerged as a distinctive player, serving as a critical conduit or gateway[34] for numerous landlocked countries through its strategic port of Mombasa: Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo, Tanzania, South Sudan, Somalia, and Ethiopia. Kenya's unique role also underscores the potential ramifications if its maritime domain is not adequately protected. Recognising this interconnectedness, the Kenyan government has made a strategic decision to securitise maritime issues, acknowledging the cascading effects on the security and economic stability of the countries reliant on access to the sea. The establishment of the Ministry of Mining, Blue Economy, and Maritime Affairs highlights the commitment to maritime security and governance, and the country's commitment as captured in its 2017 Defence White Paper.[35] Acts such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012)[36] and the Merchant Shipping Act (2009)[37] are critical in addressing evolving threats. Further, a multi-agency approach to maritime security ensures a comprehensive response to challenges, as well as international partnerships to bolster maritime capabilities, including with the EU, Canada, Saudi Arabia, China, Japan, India, Sweden and the Netherlands. Kenya has also aligned itself with regional and international frameworks for maritime security.

At a local level, the securitisation of maritime governance has led to the creation of new organisations, notably the Kenya Coast Guard Service. However, it was noted that this could potentially give rise to

---

[34] See, for example, the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway.

[35] The Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis. 2017. 2017 Defence White Paper. Internet: https://repository.kippra.or.ke/handle/123456789/52. Access: 15 December 2023.

[36] Government of Kenya. 2012. Prevention of Terrorism Act (2012). Internet: https://issafrica.org/ctafrica/uploads/PREVENTIONper cent20OFper cent20TERRORISMper cent20ACT.pdf. Access: 15 December 2023.

[37] Government of Kenya. 2009. Merchant Shipping Act (2009). Internet: https://www.un.org/depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/KEN_merchant_shipping_act.pdf. Access: 15 December 2023.

inter-agency conflicts, especially between the law enforcement mandate of the Coast Guard Service and the defence-centric duties of the Navy. This inter-agency tension is poised to extend into financial considerations and the reallocation of resources from conventional defence sectors to address internal security needs and the sustained capability to effectively safeguard the maritime domain.

Antarctica and the Southern Ocean

The Southern Ocean, governed by the Antarctic Treaty system, extends below the 60th parallel South and surrounds Antarctica. This region is crucial for the planet's survival, holding a vast array of marine species, and nearly 68 per cent of the world's freshwater reserves. The Antarctic Treaty[38] — signed in 1959 during a period of heightened geopolitical tensions — established a framework to preserve Antarctica for scientific research and peace. Notably, South Africa is the only African country with founding member status, and is actively engaged in Antarctic research and the SANAE IV station in Antarctica, which lies at 71°S, 2°W — 4280 km from East Pier in Cape Town Harbour. The Treaty's unique two-tier membership system and prohibition of military activity set the stage for governance.

However, over the years, the Antarctic Treaty has faced challenges. Rising geopolitical tensions – especially from major players such as China and Russia – have hindered efforts to establish marine protected areas and address climate change concerns. Scientific research is crucial in Antarctica, but challenges arise in enforcing regulations, especially with commercial entities engaged in activities such as biological prospecting. Furthermore, the Antarctic Treaty system lacks an overarching enforcement authority, which contributes to challenges in preserving the region.

South Africa's geographic position, straddling important sea lanes, makes the Southern Ocean and Antarctic region strategically significant. The country's possession of sub-Antarctic islands – Prince Edward Islands and Marion Island (see Figure 4) – and its claim to an extended continental shelf, adds complexity to maritime domain management. South Africa is also sometimes referred to as a polar gateway, as it provides logistical support to various countries, including Russia and China. However, a reoccurring theme for South Africa and most African states is the (in)ability to patrol these vast areas. In the case of South Africa and the Southern Ocean, a major impediment is the fact that there is diminishing fiscal space to prioritise such patrolling activities.

---

[38] Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty. 2023. The Antarctic Treaty. <u>Internet</u>: https://www.ats.aq/index_e.html
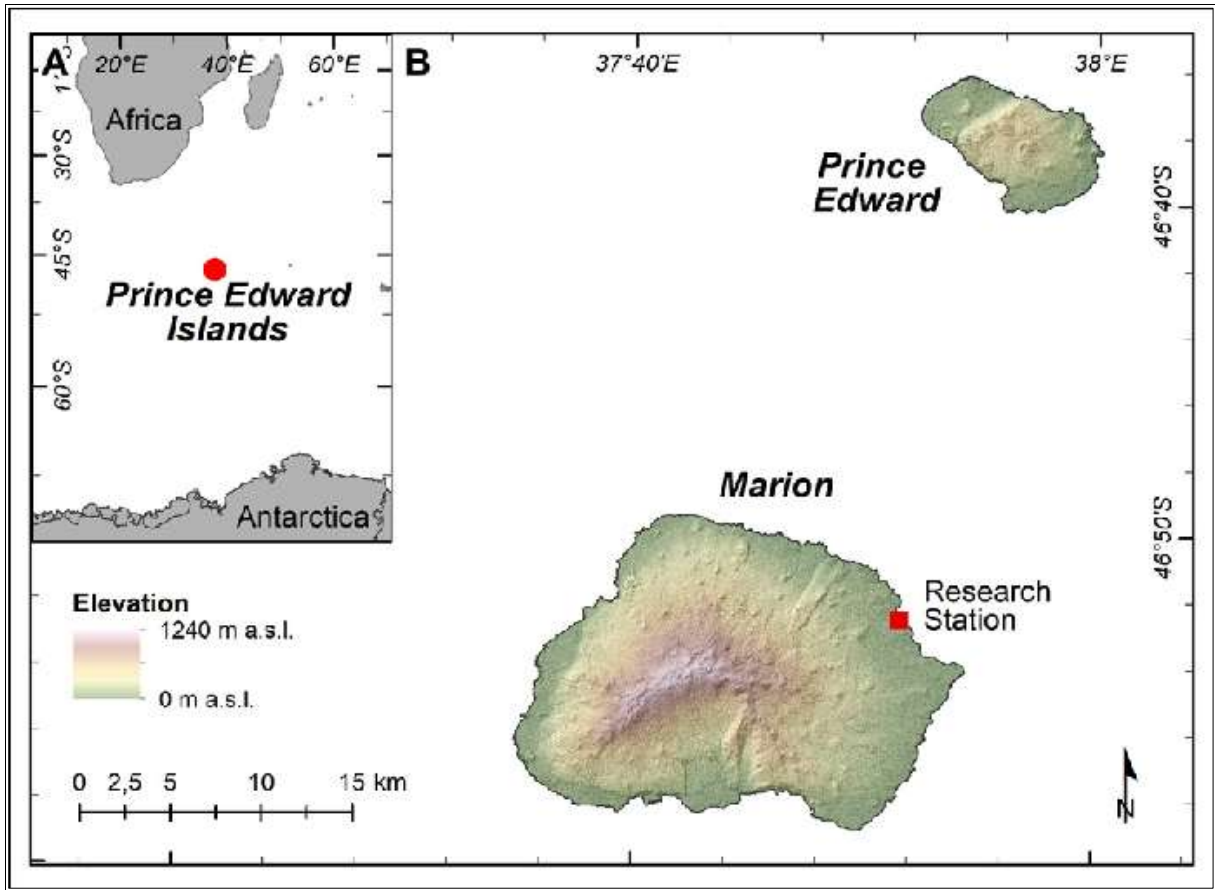
Figure 4. The location of South Africa's Prince Edward and Marion Islands[39]

Apart from fiscal constraints, South Africa has not yet prioritised the Southern Ocean. It was suggested that instead of straddling two oceans, South Africa should adopt a three oceans strategy, which would allow it to better coordinate efforts and prioritise its interests in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean. There is also the potential to reform the Antarctic Treaty to enhance inclusivity and address gaps. South Africa, with its consultative member status, can play a crucial role in advocating for reforms that consider the common good of the oceans environment, and humankind. Suggestions were also made that South Africa could leverage its scientific expertise to collaborate with other African countries in establishing an African polar research hub. This initiative would foster inclusivity and encourage African nations to develop polar expertise, potentially leading to increased participation in the Antarctic Treaty system. A further point was that given the 2048 ban on minerals, South Africa should actively participate in negotiations to ensure a balanced approach that considers environmental preservation and prevents militarisation.

Experiences in the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea is marked by its strategic importance, economic potential, and security challenges. Situated in the South Atlantic, it holds strategic significance, encompassing three regional organisations: the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC). With a population of over 650 million, a coastline spanning 6,000 kilometres, 17 coastal states, and vast exclusive economic

---

[39] Rudolph, E. M., Hedding, D. W., de Bruyn, P. N., and Nel, W. 2022. An open access geospatial database for the sub-Antarctic Prince Edward Islands. *South African Journal of Science*, 118 (9/10). https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2022/12302. Access: 16 December 2023.

zones, the region faces several challenges. These include: the complexity of managing diverse languages (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese and indigenous languages); economic imbalances within and between states; a myriad security threats, including piracy, terrorism, and trafficking; and vulnerabilities related to high unemployment, infrastructure deficits, and weak industrialisation.

The strengths of the Gulf of Guinea lie in its economic potential, vast resources, and geopolitical importance. The Gulf's unique position as a maritime passage contributes to the complexity of addressing security challenges. Since 2013, efforts have been made at regional and national levels to enhance maritime safety and security. The implementation of the Yaoundé Code of Conduct led to the creation of the International Coordination Centre (ICC) in Cameroon. Progress includes the establishment of maritime coordination zones — a Regional Centre of Maritime Security in Central Africa (CRESMAC) and West Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre (CRESMAO) — managed by the ICC, and the signing of the Code of Conduct involving twenty-six Gulf of Guinea states. However, it was pointed out that challenges persist, with delays in operationalising all zones, particularly in West Africa.

When it comes to national initiatives, countries within the Gulf of Guinea have shown commitment to addressing maritime issues, with leaders prioritising maritime development and strategy implementation. There is a growing focus on capacity building, naval acquisitions, and operator training at the national level. Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin and Ghana are identified as lead states in the Gulf of Guinea maritime strategy. However, key concerns remain, and include: ensuring freedom of navigation; facilitating the movement of goods and people; enhancing capacity building; and addressing the complex issue of armed guards on foreign ships. Additionally, mineral resource exploitation raises questions about African economic resilience in the face of global competition. A critical aspect highlighted was the need for improved communication between and amongst African states, as the lack of direct links between countries within the Gulf of Guinea impedes efficient travel and trade. While progress has been made, there is a need for continued collaboration, capacity building, and effective communication to overcome challenges.

Africa's agency in determining the governance of ocean regions

The governance of ocean regions surrounding Africa is a nuanced interplay between national sovereignty and international collaboration. Effective management and sustainable utilisation of marine resources in the African context necessitate a synergistic approach that considers both local and global perspectives. A constant theme was the issue of capacity — and the need for capacity building — and how this constrains Africa's agency. As was made evident in the case of the Gulf of Guinea, the region has all the potential for exerting agency: It has a prime geostrategic location, great economic potential, is rich with minerals, has a high population growth and large harbour facilities are currently under construction. However, there is still an infrastructure deficit, weak maritime governance, and weak industrialisation which undermine the ability of the region to realise its potential. These vulnerabilities open up the space for external actors to become involved and usurp power.

The danger, as was made clear in the discussion, is that African states remain dependent as recipients of aid from external powers. The point was made that African states do not want external powers to provide security but rather want external actors to support Africa in building its own capacity.

Concluding summary

The comprehensive presentations and discussion highlighted the multifaceted nature of ocean governance and maritime security in Africa. A recurrent theme was the issue of capacity building and

the need for African states to bolster their capabilities so that they can effectively enforce the laws of the seas they are subscribed to, and exert their agency as regional and global partners. Recommendations emphasised the importance of collaboration, resolving inter-agency conflict, ensuring adequate financing, and fostering regional partnerships effectively to address common challenges. Furthermore, recommendations underscored the need for inclusive policies, improved communication, and sustainable strategies amongst African states for preserving the world's oceans and maritime regions.

Key points

- Africa's approach to oceans needs to be understood in its historical context, which involves understanding the transformation from metaphysical perspectives in pre-colonial (and pre-industrial) times to the challenges imposed by foreign rule in the period of colonisation, and the subsequent evolution in the post-colonial period.

- Weak institutional capacity emerged as the most significant challenge to effective enforcement of maritime laws. This was a common theme in the case of the Gulf of Guinea and the Southern Ocean, with Kenya demonstrating how capacity can be strengthened.

- There is a desire for self-reliance with African states seeking assistance to build and strengthen capabilities rather than being dependent on external actors for maritime security.

- Maritime governance in African ocean regions is a nuanced interplay between balancing national sovereignty and international collaboration.

Researchers and practitioners in dialogue

Chair: Timothy Walker (Institute for Security Studies (ISS))

Speakers: Ben Joubert (Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), Brig. (retired) Loonena Naisho (former Director, Kenya Coast Guard), Prof Lissa Otto (University of Johannesburg), Elizabeth Sidiropoulos (South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), R Adm. (retired) Derek Christian.

The final session of the colloquium brought together a panel that straddled research, policy and practice to delve into the pivotal realm of international engagement, with a specific focus on maritime policy and global cooperation. The aim was to create a space where ideas and perspectives could find an audience who are in the position to influence policy. In contrast to the previous sessions, this session was not informed by a set of pre-determined questions but rather aimed to identify, deliberate on and recommend solutions for the most pertinent issues raised during the colloquium. Considering that the colloquium's overarching goal was to illuminate Africa's position, role and agency in relation to ocean regions, a prominent theme in this final session was Africa and questions about her agency in relation to the maritime domain. Along with this, other prominent themes identified were:

- The concepts of 'security' and 'maritime security'
- The role of oceans in development
- The constant issue of geopolitics, and
- Maritime diplomacy.

Below follows a summary of thematic discussions.

Africa's two-pronged focus — challenges and opportunities

One of the first observations was that Africa's maritime endeavours exhibit a dual focus that entail addressing challenges and exploring opportunities. As is perhaps to be expected, there was a disproportionate focus on the challenges, which included piracy, IUU fishing, smuggling, and drug trafficking. The view was that Africa's relatively recent concern with these challenges can largely be described as reactive, and the result of decades of 'sea-blindness'. Attention has also at times been misdirected, especially in the Southern African region, with an excessive focus on thwarting piracy attacks of which there has only been one.

The second part in this dual focus was on opportunities and the blue economy, with the oceans viewed as the next frontier in Africa's development. The island states, such as Seychelles, have been especially efficient in highlighting the importance of the oceans to their existence. Their strategic and coherent approach to the blue economy is unsurprising, given the centrality of the ocean to their economy, identity and historical narratives.

There was consensus that for Africa to play a substantial role in maritime affairs, it needs to balance addressing challenges with exploring opportunities. The panel emphasised the need for regional growth from the 'South up', and the creation of effective institutions to address the region's challenges and needs. Active participation in organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) was underscored, and the importance of influencing existing structures through proactive

engagement. The point was not to replace existing systems and institutions, but to strengthen these and to enhance inclusivity and cooperation.

Maritime security

Maritime security as a cornerstone of secure international trade was discussed extensively. Four areas of concern were identified: national security, human security, the marine environment, and economic considerations. Challenges were acknowledged, including diverse interests amongst littoral countries. Key to achieving maritime security — which, in itself, is a global task that requires effective maritime governance at national and regional levels — is maritime domain awareness. Phrased differently, it is impossible to achieve maritime security if there is no awareness of what the threats are. As one participant observed, "you cannot mitigate what you do not know". A further challenge highlighted is the low institutional capacity of many African states. There is insufficient information exchange and resource allocation which is often compounded by land issues taking precedence and perpetuating 'sea-blindness' or a 'terra-centric' focus by decision-makers. Considering these challenges, several recommendations and strategies were proposed, linked to resource generation, information sharing, and collaborative frameworks.

A possible avenue for future research to inform discussions on maritime security would be to explore the historical contexts surrounding the views and utilisation of oceans. Such research could provide insights into whether contemporary practices significantly diverge from past eras. For example, it is conceivable that, aside from technological advancements, fundamental approaches to the oceans may exhibit remarkable continuity. This proposition — that is, suggesting that the essence of our interaction with oceans remains largely unchanged — could yield valuable perspectives and deeper understanding of the historical dimensions that shaped our current maritime practices. It will also provide important insight into understanding Africa's role in maritime affairs.

Africa's role in maritime affairs

While Africa is often viewed as a unified continent, and at times it is important to do so, the continent comprises 55 distinct countries, each with its unique context and realities. Despite shared similarities amongst many nations, there is also great [diversity](). For example, the challenges faced by countries in the Horn of Africa region differ significantly from those on the Western side of the continent, those along the Mediterranean, or in the Southern regions of Africa. Acknowledging the complexities and differences will foster a nuanced understanding that recognises individual contexts and issues that have shaped each nation's trajectory and will contribute to a richer and more accurate discourse on the multifaceted dynamics related to Africa's ocean regions. Thus, there needs to be a fine balance between viewing the continent as a unitary entity and as constituted of distinct states. When acting as a unified body, Africa can play a pivotal role in the multilateral system, for example in its ability to vote as a bloc. In this sense, Africa can be both an enabling and an interruptive force — it has agenda-setting capacities.

Evolving perceptions of the ocean in many African countries signify a transition from 'sea-blindness' to a contemporary recognition of the ocean as a crucial frontier for economic development. Some argue that Africa's lack of deep maritime cultures and ties to the ocean is possibly the result of its [colonial history]() marked by negative encounters associated with the ocean. During colonial times, the oceans were the passages that opened Africa to the rules of colonial masters, to enslavement and to becoming targets of gunboat diplomacy and coercive tactics. Therefore, to understand the place of oceans in people's lives requires an understanding of historical context. While Africa traditionally had negative experiences of the oceans — particularly during the colonial period when African states were

barred from participating in the creation of early laws of the sea — it is worthwhile noting that Africa played a pivotal role in the formation of UNCLOS III which, amongst many other factors, has aimed to make the oceans more accessible for landlocked states.[40] Also with respect to the governance of the oceans, Africa has played an important role. There is thus a need to look to the future to determine opportunities for individual countries and for Africa as a continent. Countries will have key interests, especially from a policy and strategic perspective, and so will the continent.

Security and securitisation

Another theme that emerged, particularly in the discussions, was the concept of security and what this entails. For example, does a definition include only the 'hard' security threats for which the military has traditionally been responsible? A strong argument was made that the concept of security and the process of securitisation need also to consider non-traditional security threats, most markedly that of climate change in the Anthropocene. Concerns were voiced that it often appears, especially in the military, that these 'softer issues' are not discussed. However, representatives from the military refuted this, noting that the issue of climate change and broader environmental concerns are often a robust aspect of debate in the military. In fact, it was pointed out that in Kenya, for example, there has been widespread recognition of climate change as a contributing factor to conflict. In other states and regions, the example was given of the decrease in fish stocks being used to predict conflict. The problem, it was pointed out, lies in the fact that these discussions often remain within the military and do not feature in public debates, thus giving the impression that they are not of high relevance within the military, and in the security environment.

It was suggested that a change or elevation from naval to maritime diplomacy might be fruitful since it indicates a shift away from traditional diplomacy to a broader understanding of the role that oceans play in development. Expressed differently, oceans are not only to be conceptualised in military terms, but as frontiers of development.

A developmental lens

The potential of oceans for development, especially in the context of Africa's rising young population, was explored in some depth. The presentations emphasised narratives around oceans as a critical element in development strategies, highlighting the centrality of oceans to the AU Agenda 2063,[41] and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The envisioned AfCFTA holds a transformative agenda centred on enhancing productive capacity, fostering industrialisation, and pursuing sustainable practices, ideally in a green and environmentally sustainable framework. The discussion emphasised the pivotal role of oceans, and the blue economy, in realising this vision. The significance lies not only in the roots of transportation, but also in the foundational aspects of infrastructure, including ports that form the backbone of regional value chains across the continent. The nexus between ocean security and the seamless movement of goods is fundamental, ensuring both the safeguarding of maritime routes and the efficient transportation of products. This intricate interplay underscores a crucial set of issues that extends beyond logistics; it encapsulates narratives that shape our perception of the oceans and reflect a holistic understanding of oceans as facilitators of economic growth, trade, and sustainable development within the broader context of the ambitious goals set out in AfCFTA.

---

[40] Egede, E. 2023. UNCLOS 82: Africa's contributions to the development of modern law of the sea 40 years later. Internet: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0308597X22005103. Access: 14 December 2023.

[41] The African Union 2023. *African Agenda 2063*. Internet: https://au.int/en/agenda2063/overview. Access: 8 December 2023.

A responsibility for landlocked states to contribute to littoral state security

When reflecting on the potential of oceans, priority is usually given to countries that directly border the oceans. However, it is equally important to consider the relationship between littoral states and landlocked countries. The example was given of Kenya's maritime security that has an impact on the countries that are dependent on Kenya for sea access. Kenya's commitment to maritime security illustrates the importance of coordinated efforts through national legislation, a multi-agency Coast Guard, and participation in regional frameworks. It also shows the importance of a holistic view and recognising interlinkages between maritime security, the blue economy, and ocean health. However, the question was posed whether landlocked nations should become more actively engaged in fostering and directly contributing to maritime stability in their coastal counterparts.

Geopolitics, global governance and climate change

The intersection of oceans with geopolitics, regional interests, global governance, and climate change emerged as a key theme. The need for a deeper understanding of the actions of external powers, South-South cooperation, and addressing developmental dimensions in understanding oceans was emphasised. The discussions on geopolitics prompted a reflection on the often-overlooked geopolitical advantages and constraints of Africa as an entire continent. While acknowledging this perspective might be subjective, it is essential to scrutinise the geopolitical dynamics in conjunction with Africa's extensive presence in various ocean regions — the Atlantic to the west, the Indian Ocean to the east, the Pacific further to the east and west and the Antarctic and Southern Ocean to the south. However, the discourse tends to focus significantly on the continent's northern and eastern coastlines, with minimal attention directed towards the South Atlantic. This omission is particularly glaring, as even discussions around the Atlantic tend to centre only briefly on Brazil's role without delving into more extensive considerations concerning the South Atlantic and ties between South America and West Africa. Thus, there emerges a critical need for a more comprehensive exploration of the geopolitical advantages and constraints that encompass the entirety of Africa, while acknowledging its multifaceted positioning across significant ocean domains.

The issue of climate change becomes especially pertinent when securitised, with its implications extending far beyond neatly confined spaces within the oceans. It is imperative to delve into a more profound understanding of this multifaceted challenge, and to consider it with greater clarity and intent as it shapes the approach, planning and management of ocean resources. At its core, this imperative arises due to the fundamental connection between climate change and two pivotal facets of African engagement in ocean regions: addressing ocean challenges and harnessing economic opportunities. It was pointed out that acknowledging the intricate interplay between climate change and these key areas paves the way for a more holistic and purposeful strategy in navigating the complex dynamics of ocean regions, and the importance of sustainable practices and resilient policies in order effectively to address both the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Maritime diplomacy, securitisation and development

Finally, a compelling imperative exists for the augmentation of military security cooperation, recognising that bolstering national capacity for maritime security holds the key to fostering regional capabilities. The significance of collaboration in this realm becomes evident, emphasising that impact extends beyond individual states to encompass broader regional capacities, and that the effectiveness of any collaborative endeavour hinges on the ability to transcend state-centric approaches. Meaningful collaboration would necessitate that initiatives go beyond the confines of individual states and aspire to integrate all users of the ocean into a cohesive framework; thus, the importance of

maritime as opposed to naval diplomacy. Such an inclusive approach must acknowledge the interconnected nature of maritime activities, thereby underlining the importance of a collective and holistic strategy.

Concluding remarks – moving forward

The colloquium concluded by posing questions for future progress, emphasising expectations from academics and practitioners, and underscoring the vital importance of bridging the gap between geopolitical perspectives and ground-level realities. Ongoing dialogue emerged as a key theme for facilitating a deeper understanding of global maritime affairs. Suggestions were made to bring together the relevant stakeholders on a more frequent basis. Furthermore, throughout the discussions, the necessity of collaboration, nuanced approaches, and a holistic understanding to navigate the complexities of the maritime domain became evident.

The key points encapsulated a rich array of insights: the colloquium aimed to bring to the fore Africa's role in ocean regions, and emphasised the need for strategic coherence and consideration of climate change implications. Africa's maritime focus involves addressing challenges such as historical sea-blindness and exploring opportunities, particularly within the context of the blue economy. The importance of 'South-up' regional growth and effective institutions to address regional needs was emphasised, along with active participation in organisations like the Indian Ocean Rim Association to influence existing structures.

The overarching call from this session was for inclusive multilateralism, envisioning academia's role in expanding debates within organisations like BRICS to enhance inclusivity and cooperation without replacing existing systems. Finally, a distinctly practical suggestion was made, namely that there needs to be a concerted effort by academics working on ocean regions research to monitor the calendar for events that relate to the oceans. This would include being aware of important dates such as meetings of the seabed convention, or the commission on the continental shelf. This is a way in which academics can – in a very simple and direct way – raise awareness about oceans and ensure that they themselves do not fall into the trap of sea-blindness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The final section of this report synthesises the inputs provided by the presenters and participants to inform an agenda for future collaborative research projects related to the theme of the colloquium, *Ocean Regions in an Era of Global Transformation*.

Here it should be noted that the 2023 colloquium built on and advanced the following recommendations that were made in the 2022 report.[42] In summary:

• Theoretical research: To pursue research that focused on the evolution of ocean regions; climate change and its impact on evolving oceans regions; and oceans governance.

• Applied research: To explore the role and functions of Africa's regional organisations — that is, the AU and the regional economic committees — in promoting the blue economy and maritime security.

Research agenda — 2023/2024

The collaborative research agenda for the colloquium is selectively multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in nature and the purpose is to establish a collective understanding of the theories, concepts and practices associated with ocean regions in an era of global transformation.

An issue that received much attention throughout the discussions was that of the nature and characteristics — and of the underlying values and ideas — of the evolving 'new' world order. Although Acharya's notion of a multiplex world was generally accepted as a good way of describing the current move from unipolarity to what is often perceived as multipolarity, more attention needs to be paid to the values and ideas of the various key players on the geopolitical stage, and to an African perspective/s on what a multiplex world would entail.

Closely related to ideas centred on the changing global order are those of the place of seascapes in this order: how to conceive of the world as 'terraqueous', and how to develop governance architecture to order this world in a way that would transcend conventional (and increasingly weak) theoretical approaches that privilege power and profit over the well-being of humans and the environment. In short, the evolving world order is under-theorised in the context of what can be described as a whole-of-earth (if not a planetary) approach — a terraqueous conceptualisation in the era of the Anthropocene. Also, closely related to the evolving world order/s is the nature and characteristics of the foundational rules of order. What exactly does a 'rules-based system' mean? Whose rules inform the system and what are the core principles of such a system? Such questions also imply issues of governance, and specifically the governance of ocean regions.

The relationship between human security and maritime security deserves attention, as does the impact of climate change on human security in an age of Western (oceanic) securitisation endeavours. The extent to which various Indo-Pacific strategies are focused on geopolitics rather than human security — and the exclusion of the East African seaboard from many of these strategies — need further investigation, especially on the part of African researchers. The impact of great power competition on the Indian Ocean region, and indications of such competition evolving in the South Atlantic, requires closer scrutiny on the part of researchers. Core question are: What is the African response? More importantly, what would constitute an African agenda for maritime interests?

---

[42] *The Rise of Ocean Regions: Governance Challenges for the Indo-Pacific and the Atlantic.* See also footnote 1: A copy of the report of the first colloquium (2022) can be accessed here.

Directly linked to the above points, is the impact and implications of an expanded BRICS — a BRICS+ — with specific reference to ocean regions. With the exception of Ethiopia, BRICS countries are connected by and across the oceans, yet there is little evidence that the group perceives the ocean domain as of any relevance in relation to global order/s. Should BRICS consider developing an 'oceans' strategy, one that encompasses the ocean domains spanned by the group's membership? The question of whether BRICS is bigger than the sum-total of its members was raised, including questions around the institutionalisation of the group, that is, the potential benefits of moving from being an 'informal' to a 'formal' institution.

Antarctica and the Southern Ocean deserve serious consideration, especially in light of the Antarctic Treaty System and a range of challenges, such as ocean conservation, environmental protection and geostrategic rivalries, as well as territorial claims by a number of signatories to the Treaty. For South Africa this is an especially important issue, given its own rights, responsibilities and involvement in the Southern Ocean, as well as the fact that it is a founding member of the Treaty.

Finally, capacity building in relation to the maritime domain and maritime governance in and for African states is of crucial importance. What is required? How can this be achieved? How can Africa balance national and regional interests with international interests and collaborate at a regional and global level to ensure agency, and to contribute to maritime development and security?

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AI	Artificial intelligence
AIM	Africa's Integrated Maritime (Strategy)
AU	African Union
BBNJ	Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CRESMAC	Regional Centre of Maritime Security in Central Africa
CRESMAO	West Africa Regional Maritime Security Centre
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEZ	Exclusive economic zone
GGC	The Gulf of Guinea Commission
IBSAMAR	India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime
ICC	International Coordination Centre
IOC	Indian Ocean Commission
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IOR	Indian Ocean Rim
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
IR	International Relations
IRT	International Relations Theory
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
ITLOS	International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea
IUU	Illegal, unreported and unregulated
LION	Lower Indian Ocean Network
MARS	Mauritius and Rodrigues Submarine Cable System
METISS	Meltingpot Indianoceanic Submarine System
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDB	New Development Bank
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
RECs	Regional economic committees
RMIFC	Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre
SAFE	South African Far East
SAIIA	South African Institute for International Affairs
SANAE	South African National Antarctic Expedition
SARChI	South African Research Chairs Initiative
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme