# OCEANS AND OCEAN REGIONS GOVERNANCE

Third Colloquium, University of Pretoria, South Africa

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UP Department of Political Sciences &
Institute for Security Studies

Ocean Regions Programme · ISS INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY STUDIES · UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA / UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA / YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA · NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES · SABTT South African BRICS Think Tank

# Preface

In November 2024, the Ocean Regions Programme of the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria hosted its third colloquium on the evolution of oceans and ocean regions governance, in collaboration with the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), Pretoria. Building on the earlier two colloquiums, this event convened academics, researchers and practitioners with particular emphasis on the African continent and its island states. A deliberate effort was made to include postgraduate students and young scholars in the presentations and deliberations.

For Africa – in some ways a 'mega' island with several smaller island states in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, and links to the Southern Ocean and Antarctica – what happens on and beneath the surface of its oceans and in coastal areas, are of growing importance and of political, economic and developmental concern. Oceans also connect Africa to other states and communities in these evolving regions and are dynamic arenas where global geopolitical, environmental, and economic interests converge. As external actors increasingly assert their interests in these waters, African stakeholders must navigate these complexities.

Several threats to the continent's littoral and island states need to be addressed. The alarming intensity in armed conflicts in and across the continent, many of which have links to the governance (or lack thereof) of ocean spaces, and the lack of resources to control and patrol territorial waters and build sustainable blue economies, are only some examples. Climate change and new technologies for ocean bed exploration, including minerals and energy, as well as warfare and transnational crime, are showing up the gaps and weaknesses of international maritime law and legal paradigms in dealing with some of these threats and challenges. Questions about how we conceive of territoriality, sovereignty, statehood and citizenship in a rapidly changing environment are becoming pertinent. The situation in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean, and changes in sea routes, hold challenges and opportunities for Africa's littoral and island states – are they ready to manage and benefit from these new realities?

These were some of the questions that framed the third colloquium, which focused specifically on the following broad topics and issues:

- Africa's ocean regions in the context of current geopolitical contestation
- Incorporating ocean regions into International Relations theory
- Island states: approaches to ocean and oceanic realities
- Law of the Sea/Ocean Law: developments and new issues
- BRICS+, the G20 and Oceans 20
- African regional perspectives and challenges
- The future of the Cape Sea Route.

There is little doubt that the evolution of ocean regions will continue to be a strategic priority for great and emerging powers, littoral and island states, and regional and international organisations. Both the African Union and several of its member states are seeking to position themselves in the rapidly changing environment on their maritime shores. Whose rules, values and principles shape the evolution of ocean regions in the context of global change, competition and contestation; and what are the implications of these trends and processes for global, regional and national governance structures?

The colloquium amply demonstrated the relevance of African perspectives in the development of a strategic roadmap for Africa's engagement in global ocean governance, and highlighted the key steps and strategies African states and regional organisations can and must take to ensure their interests are effectively represented in international maritime forums.

*Prof. Maxi Schoeman*
*February 2025.*

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*Chair:*     *Prof. Christopher Isike (Head of Department: Political Sciences, UP)*

*Speaker:*     *Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor (author, Dragonfly Sea)*

*Rapporteur:*   *Yu-Shan Wu*

## Introduction

In his welcome address, Prof. Chris Isike, Head of the Department of Political Sciences at the University of Pretoria (UP), noted the importance of collaborative efforts amongst national and international stakeholders about oceans and ocean regions, and the role of South Africa, given its tri-oceanic position between the Atlantic, Indian and Southern Oceans. The past two decades have witnessed the impact of maritime security on Africa's stability, development, prosperity and sovereignty. The continent faces a range of serious challenges in its maritime domain, from IUU fishing and transnational crime, to climate change and the devastation of war. Its seas are too vast and too integrated into the global political economy – and too important to global security – to be safeguarded by any one country or regional grouping alone. International partnerships and collective, institutionalised governance frameworks, strategies and policies at the continental level are required to ensure that maritime threats are transformed into opportunities for peace, security and sustainable development

The colloquium presented an important opportunity for national and international experts to deliberate on these issues and challenges. Central to the deliberations, Isike reminded the colloquium, 'lies the driving force of sustainable development: people and communities [which is] ultimately also the end goal of ocean region governance. We easily lose sight of this important rationale for our work – to ensure a safe and secure world, a place where people come first and where the seas are crucial to their survival and quality of life.'

It is in this context too that the inimitable Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, the renowned Kenyan author and activist, was invited to deliver the keynote address. Her address built on earlier discussions, held in May 2024 at the University of Pretoria.[1] It is, in particular, her novel, _The Dragonfly Sea_,[2] that compelled her presence at this colloquium.

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[1] For an event report, see: Sea Change: Novel ways of Imagining the Oceans, Ocean Regions Programme, 21 May 2024.

[2] Vintage Books, 2019.

# KEYNOTE: A cartography of futures

## Re-imagining Oceanic Futures: *African Glimmerings*[3]

*Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor*



> *The experience of being in the world is one of constant navigation, of locating oneself in relation to others...of movements through an array of geographical and historical phenomena. The human condition is one of being 'at sea'.*
>
> *Robert Talley Jr (2011)*

Oceanic histories are entwined with belonging, story, memory, provision, displacement, and reconnection. We are reminded by Talley of the need for reclaiming narratives, underscoring our ability to continually reorient ourselves amid vast, changing oceans of existence.

We have come to such a time as this, haven't we?

Distinguished guests, members of the diplomatic community, scholars, friends, ladies and gentlemen, Good Morning.

It is an honour to be with you today. I am warmed by the welcome I have received, as a literary artist who presumptuously leans into, and offers, perhaps, non-conventional views on pressing geopolitical issues.

It is all because of the conjuring of dear Professor Maxi Schoeman.

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[3] This text is a combination of the speaker's transcript and her presentation on the day.

Professor Schoeman – Maxi – had asked me to riff off, in not too many words, a presentation I made here in May, together with the gifted Drs Charne Lavery and Yu-Shan Wu, when we creatively explored aspects of the complex layers including that of history and culture attached to our relationships – especially the African relationships which are often absent as a focus – with our seas.

I also read from an excerpt of *Dragonfly Sea (2019),* which I may not be able to do today.

I asked then, and I ask today: forgive me in advance, should I tread on figurative toes of those who are indeed awesomely steeped in, and know the immensities of our waters in so many diverse and impressive ways. No malice is intended. I am an approved stowaway aboard this vessel, a little rude on the edges, but thrilled to join your voyage.

I am here because of a novel I wrote, *The Dragonfly Sea.* A tribute of sorts to the alchemy of waters, people, place and spaces, and how these shape time and shape humanity. This is a story of Eastern African pluriversal civilisations and worlds dialoguing with other pluriversal worlds, a conversation mediated by the sea, memory, history, and the imagination of other civilisations and worlds. Our Swahili Seas (our Ziwa Kuu, Afrasian Sea, the Erythrean Sea, the Western/Eastern Ocean, temporarily known as the 'Indian' Ocean) is a main character, in this story that unfolds mostly in Africa and then also in China. The African part is located on Pate Island – one of the world's longest surviving island states that is now part of the Republic of Kenya.

> *A polyglot and poly-ethnic society…and culture developed over several millennia of intercourse between Africa and the lands across the… Ocean…distinctly cosmopolitan, immersed in dense webs of production and exchange, ethnicity, kinship, and residence, with influences on material culture, social institutions, belief systems, language and literature.*
>
> *Abdul Sheriff (2008)*

The work looks at the global monsoon complex – worlds of, what friend and thalassic thinker-scholar and poet from Singapore, Dr Alvin Pang, theorises about, and refers to as *'confluences'*. It echoes the old historical Afro-Asian maritime imaginaries, and inserts sea poetics, myths, rites, heritage, geopolitics, kinship patterns,

cartographies, and geneologies lived through a little girl called Ayaana. It obliquely alludes to the big themes of this period: China, historical sea routes, power relations, multipolarity, pluricentrism and the idea of *the coexistence of worlds*, and *worlds within a world.*

By way of introduction, I am African – East African of Kenyan provenance. To be this is to be a creature of confluences, of the threshold worlds mediated by sea winds, sea-borne ideas, and currents.

I am, naturally, preoccupied with the place, future of the many Africas, including Oceanic Africa in crafting a new kind of future.

I think of Edward Said's 'new geographical consciousness of a decentered or multiple-centered world…', reinforced by the thoughts of so many others, including Fanon, Césaire, Mignolo, Dussel, among others, that now feel like tangible options.

When I was seven years old, my parents took my sisters and I to Mombasa, and I met the Swahili Sea – the Western Indian Ocean to others. In so far as a child can have a transcendent experience, where the lines and limits disappear from both her mind and the earth, this was it, at the site of the swelling dark blue waves at high tide, the sound, the shore, the smell, the birds, the feeling, the bigness and endlessness. Never had I encountered anything more beautiful, more eternal. From that day to this moment, I remain sea-haunted. There is not a day I do not long for the sea, and when I am in the sea, by the sea I feel most human. I really am a much better human there. Yesterday evening when the distinguished Rear Admiral Hendricks was telling us about her adventures with the wrath and the temper of the sea, of swells that swamped giant boats, my heart was beating fast with such a secret thrill, and rather than take the side of the hapless humans under sea peril, I was thinking, *Yeah! Go sea! Go!*

So when did you first meet your sea? Do you recall your feelings, the sensation? Does the professional you, crafting layers and layers upon the waters, remember that first encounter? What was your relationship with the ocean then, and how different is it from your relationship now?

If we had more time, I would have offered you five minutes to reflect with the person next to you, to hear each other's 'When I met the Sea' story. Maybe we can do that later. But the point is that this is a work about relationship.

For us today, reimagining an oceanic future demands an in-depth engagement with a complex, layered mosaic of interconnected themes – spanning history, philosophy, culture, geography, mythology, technology, politics, and ecology. These elements converge with global shifts in sea routes, geopolitical positioning, and emerging global entities like the BRI (Belt-and-Road Initiative) and BRICS, alongside the evolving dynamics of those countries now asserting themselves as intrinsic to the 'Indo-Pacific' region.

The old order is in decline. The present scramble for 'Indo-Pacific-ness' by the Atlanticists is not only about regional identity, but also a reflection of real shifts – or should I say, restorations and returns – in global influence and strategic positioning.

> *The modernist dominance of the Atlantic is yielding again to old paradigms made new – and for African oceanic thinkers, this season certainly also means the potential to redefine global trade, cultural exchanges, power relations and politics power in the 21st century.*

The many here who are from non-African countries, of course you are most welcome to this continent, and South African hospitality is second to none…maybe second only to Kenyan welcomes – just kidding, but I will spend most of this session speaking of African oceanic dreaming, and doing so in the manner of those idlers who used to throw their gloves on the ground and declare, '*I demand satisfaction: let us duel at dawn.*'

So for the next few minutes, do bear with this domestic whine, because it does have a bearing to your own musings.

Africa's maritime thinking, so often subsumed into others' more consolidated reflections linked to their common story, are constrained by a lack of common position, a – let me use that word again – consolidated position and shared story.

In a space of intellectual oceanic encounter, a continent of 54 nations is often marked by its absence, with South Africa alone often showing up.

Yet aware of the unravellings of this present age, the undermining of the codes of conduct of human beingness, including UN resolutions, the Rome Convention, and as we witness in the assorted waters, the Laws of the Sea, with all respect to the rest of you, this is a powerful opportunity for Africa to step forward with a daring vision, imagination and thinking and seize the potential of a new age of oceanic growth.

As creatures of the earth caught in a long season of profound geopolitical shifts, marked by deep uncertainty, and the ever-looming threat of war, as people stand, unfortunately, as mostly helpless witnesses to human depravities and atrocities – we cannot pretend, as much as we wish to, that our humanity is not in disarray again.

The norms that once governed our conduct are in abeyance. Do we, by any stretch of the imagination, believe that the Laws of the Sea we believed in will endure?  The violence that shakes us to the core have not spared the seas at all, and every day, realignments move closer and closer to our African shores. South Africa can bear great testament to this, as the alternative route following that ongoing kerfuffle in the Red Sea.

The muscular re-emergence of China, Russia, India, Iran, and the consolidation – that word again, of the world's nations around the promise of BRICS are powerful signifiers of that wide swing of the historical arc. New rivalries reshape the global order, new demands for very odd-fellow alliances – I am looking at you Quads – and weaker nations caught in the crossfire scramble to also figure out their way, or in the case of most of the nations of Africa – bury their heads deeper in the proverbial sea sand.

The world's attention shifts to the Indian Ocean and, also, the Pacific. Meanwhile, the planet's climate, rebelling after centuries of abuse, reminds us of the fragile state of our relationship with the earth.

In this Gramscian interregnum – we have an urgent need for renewed oceanic narratives – distinct and articulate, not built on trending words and clichés. Not only Africa, but the entire world.

In our May [session](), we noted that even the United Nations' *Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development* struggles to move the conversation beyond the confines of scientific parameters. The focus on empirical data often sidelines the cultural and human aspects, the relations that are essential to our understanding of our spaces. After all, we are incarnational beings, not mere spectres floating on abstract ideas and data. How, then, can we continue to view our oceans simply as resources to exploit, without acknowledging that they are living entities? They are teeming with life forms, rich with stories, identities, relationships and histories that, if we intend to thrive, demand our attention. The perils the oceans face are human

generated, human created, and point to the tragedy of an enshrined cult of carelessness and contempt for the elements of life, of which we are a small part. Hubris, the tragic limits of our collective imagination, and a foolish unwillingness to retreat or admit to the wrongful tangents in our thinking.

I dot this presentation with many questions.

To start:

How do our nations read the signs of time and fate? Why do our African nations hesitate to take full control of their seas? Is it fear, indifference, or a lack of vision? Have we, in our intellectual and strategic pursuits, cut ourselves off from the waters that define us? How do we build a future where Africa stands as a maritime presence – economically, culturally, intellectually, and strategically? Why are South-South maritime collaborations so scarce? Why are we so neglectful, as a continent, of the regional alliances that could better serve and secure our future?

And to echo the insights of polymath, philosopher, and rhetorician, Professor Souleymane Bachir Diagne, 'the future is what we create.' The future, he asserts, is praxis – a lived engagement with time, the present, and the past. The future is a story we tell ourselves. What, then, is the story of Africa in the world's maritime future? I am not ignoring the stories you have brought here, dear guests, but it is essential as an artist to point to the metaphorical nakedness of the emperor, and propose: dress up, before setting forth to meet your peers, as peers.

What kind of common story? One that, without shame, prioritises our continent as a whole, reasserting its advantage as the custodian of multiple sea gateways. How do we shape an African maritime future that recognises our unique role as stewards of these vast, vital oceans? Yes, yes, you have G20 conference preparations etc. etc. But I am struck – and I do not want to seem rude – how in these conferences, including BRICS, even with the presence of South Africa, the nations of our continent lack a coherent, inspiring personality and strategy, and we constantly look like the picked-up hitchhiker riding uncomfortably in someone's cool car. And we the witnesses, trained to be polite, think in our secret hearts, 'But who dat?'

I ask this question, mindful of our unresolved petty jealousies, wilful ignorance, and the senseless competition between us. The big rhetoric without committing resources. This is a call to, and from, the future – a call for us to move beyond survival

and reaction, and, with purpose, in this real season of opportunity, chart a course for a richer, more profound existence and presence as a continent, and to know that this overt self-assertion better serves the entire world, a world that, again to be frank, has simply run out of good ideas. It circles on the old as if humpty dumpty can put itself together again.

Now correct me if I'm wrong, but all across the continent, why do we set sail into time without any attention to or engagement with so many knowledges born from being a part of what is humanity's oldest and longest relationship with the seas.

I notice in pockets of the continent, the persistence of the Hegelian partition of Africa – that 'sub-Saharan' 'North Africa in the Middle East' distortion. As we seek to lay a firmer hold of leveraging African maritime agencies, there are some old stupidities we need to wean ourselves from in order to truly undertake an epistemological exercise of reoccupying our geographies and finding an engaging lexicon closer to our interconnectedness, our realities, our histories and our dreams for the future. It's impossible to seize a hold of consolidated African maritime vision when the abiding story is governed by others' self-interests and narrow ideas about African geography and history. We are also a Mediterranean Sea people. A Red Sea people.

Owning to this also has an implication for the conversations you are having, doesn't it? After all, when the dudu hits the fan, fleeing fleets remember African harbours. No amount of geopolitical re-posturing hides the truth – so why don't we, as a continent, step into it?

Still-dominant powers, anchored in an outdated paradigm, can only assert their interests within the confines of their familiar yet limited imagination. Although the geopolitical fiction of American and European claims to the Indo-Pacific region is deeply problematic, especially because it threatens to introduce a reductive, bellicose mindset into our waters – that is their story.

I am not complaining people.

I am saying, here lies an opportunity for Africa. To take advantage of intrinsic ignorances and build and project a more encompassing reality. Yes a radical and transformative intellectual and imaginative upheaval is needed to re-envision oceanic maritime futures, and that cannot be realised without a radical and

transformative intellectual and imaginative upheaval within the African maritime domains that encompass its official 30,500-kilometre coastline (not counting its islands and outlying topologies) as a vital artery of the world's seas. And if Asia weren't there with its 62,800 kilometres, I'd suggest we offer ourselves as the Queen Bee of the Seas – but, as my late dad used to say, '*everything in moderation.*'

I said in May, and I say it again, particularly striking is South Africa's unique position at the confluence of three major oceanic gateways: the Indian, Atlantic, and Southern Oceans. This nation has the potential to be the '*Cerberus of the Seas,*' standing sentinel over coveted portals. Yet, in its vision and imagination this nation's gaze persists in turning inward, as if unaware that the battles of the future are already fought upon the waves. With nearly 2,800 kilometres of coastline, South Africa's naval presence appears closer to that of a modest island republic than an oceanic giant. I said then that this smallness, while not inherently shameful, becomes troubling when the destiny of an entire continent – nay, the world – is at stake. I nodded to the 'Rainbow Nation' ideal, but ask again, who is to say that South Africa cannot embody both the rainbow and its trinity of seas?

What would it take to recognise the ocean as a place where ideologies could be transcended? What if our legal frameworks recognised the need to preserve the ineffable – the essence of the sea itself – as fiercely as we guard commercial and military rights? We stand at terrifying crossroads as humanity – with apocalyptic weapons being deployed, with an emerging generation driven to live detached from their human sensibilities, one that extend that damaging, debilitating, and destructive bellicose gaze upon our seas.

Something has to change.

This is not a Pollyanna-ish vision; to those who govern, who make laws, and who shape the future of oceanic use: the time has come to reckon with the reality that the oceans, like every living thing, have limits. They are finite, vulnerable, and if they perish, we, as part of their interconnected system, will perish with them.

Will Africa, inhabit and project its 'sea agency' and its maritime imagination beyond policy or geopolitical strategy? It is a matter of identity, belonging, sovereignty, and world-building. I am not suggesting that we excuse the continent from ongoing discourses, rather, what I propose is that the continent also shows up with a detailed,

future-world proposing position paper, a vision that disrupts complacencies, and generates annoyance. We must be gadflies, irritants that compel the powerful to swat at us and complain about 'African Oceans'.

Even if they complain, at least they are talking about us.

The future is a story we tell ourselves.

So, what are some bottlenecks to African maritime dreaming? In May, we noted that there are few spaces in Africa where maritime and ocean scholars, thinkers, explorers, and artists can gather in an interdisciplinary, curated manner to meet, think, experiment, and collaborate. Given the urgency of our times, this colloquium serves as a reminder that we must dive deep – see what I did there – into the vast smorgasbord of themes and omissions that an entire continent must confront.

To make this even more personal, may I ask you – even you our visitors:

What do the African seas mean to each of you, both personally and professionally? This matters, because it leads to the next: whom do you serve?

To the African citizens, to what, or to whom, do you belong? Not much time is given to deeply reflect on what it means for you, for us to be custodians of African seas, to prioritise African interests, and to invest in African maritime security and sovereignty. What does a distinctly African vision of the seas look like – one that is not a mere copy-paste of external concepts, or one where we co-opt others' self-interests and adapt them as if we invented them ourselves?

Your upcoming conferences are probably going to dwell heavily on matters of maritime security and sovereignty. Are there sufficient formats of alliances among African nations to protect shared maritime interests, counter external influences, and bolster collective bargaining power in international waters? What does it mean when so much of the continent's maritime infrastructure and development are designed, not for its citizens but for the gain of outsiders? Is that why African maritime citizens can casually say 'Indo-Pacific' without flinching in pain or shame?

Just asking.

What direct measures can be taken to amplify African strategies in the global maritime conversation?

What would a deliberate focus on African maritime education, research, and technology essential for shaping the continent's future as a responsible maritime leader and respected guardian of its seas also look like?

Finally, where and how do we begin to tell the story of the African maritime space not as fragmented coastlines, but as a united oceanic entity? How will we chart new ideological and imaginative routes, with the goal of securing a resilient maritime legacy for the generations to come? What about African sea aesthetics, and an anthropology of African sea belonging?

As you all set sail, I wish you a daring course into uncharted waters and falling over epistemic edges.

Over to you now. Wishing you fair winds and following seas.

And with that, this stowaway disembarks.

*Safari njema!*

# PANEL 1 | Ocean regions: context and issues

*Chair:*        Jaimal Anand (DIRCO/University of Pretoria)

*Speakers:*     Prof. Kostas Ifantis (Panteion University), Hon. Kathleen Ayensu (Commissioner, African Union Commission on International Law), Dr Vishal Surbun (University of KwaZulu-Natal), Prof. Licinia Simão (Coimbra University), Prof. Chris Alden (London School of Economics/LSE IDEAS).

*Rapporteur:*    Adam Louw

## Introduction

Jaimal Anand opened the first panel discussion with the following observation: 'this particular colloquium is occurring in a world order that may very well be subject to significant change.' The gravity, then, of such a statement aligns well with the intended scope of the session in the third colloquium of the Ocean Regions Programme: to present an umbrella overview of the state of ocean regions in the dimensions of geopolitics (and geoeconomics and geostrategy), international law, and international relations theory (IRT). Speakers were asked to address the following questions.

- What is the current state of play in ocean regions?
- Who are the main actors, and how do their concerns, challenges, competition and attempts at convergence play out?
- What emerging challenges and legal gaps are reshaping the Law of the Sea?
- How can international legal frameworks adapt to address these evolving issues and challenges?
- How can the 'turn to the oceans' be incorporated into international relations theory?

The main themes that emerged from the ensuing discussion are presented below. Kostas Ifantis contextualised the geopolitics of an increasingly 'hot' aquaterreous domain: the Eastern Mediterranean (EM), a region whose fortunes and frailties have global proportions. Commissioner Kathleen Ayensu and Vishal Surbun forayed into the legal dimensions of ocean governance, with Ayensu centring Africa in her contextualisation of historical and current developments around maritime matters, while Surbun spoke to the difficulties and challenges in cohering legal frameworks under the rubric of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The final two speakers, Chris Alden and Licínia Simão, turned to the academic domain of international relations theory (IRT) and based their presentation on theorising ocean governance on a paper co-authored with Prof. Maxi Schoeman.

## The Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean (EM) is a region marked by complex civil wars, inter-state conflicts, and significant geopolitical competition. It is a context in which global geopolitical trends have played out as far back as Napolean's expeditions to

Egypt and Syria in the late 1790s. In the more recent past, and following World War 2, the region has been a hotbed for wars entailing Israel and its state and non-state actor enemies, and the Turkish invasion in Cyprus. Today it serves as a key route for instability from the Middle East and Sahel impacting Europe, and it experiences political and security uncertainties due to an unclear US posture, especially at the time of writing. The area is also a stage for Russia to challenge the West and has seen significant Chinese infrastructure investment through the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI). The region is influenced by regional powers like Türkiye and Iran, the (economically motivated) strategic involvement of the Arab Gulf states, and is a potential route for new energy and economic corridors, albeit stifled. In the EM, there is a notable contrast between the constant trade and diplomacy underway in the region, and the lack of tangible and sustainable institutional outcomes such as economic integration, connectivity, and stable geopolitical partnerships. The complexity of this context can be summarised in five points:

1. *Security dynamics.* (See Figure 1.) Türkiye's assertive posture, major infrastructure and energy projects, and its complex relations with Western partners, dominate the region's geopolitics. The resurgence of brinkmanship between Türkiye and Greece/Cyprus remains a possibility that hangs over the current fragile thaw, with Cyprus perceiving Türkiye as an existential threat and Greece as an overriding one. Additionally, Iran's animosity toward Israel exacerbates instability. Despite a maritime border agreement between Israel and Lebanon, tensions persist, especially after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks on Israel, which have increased the potential for major interstate conflict in the EM. Regional conflicts – whether frozen, active, direct, or proxy – continue to outweigh the stabilising potential of energy discoveries.
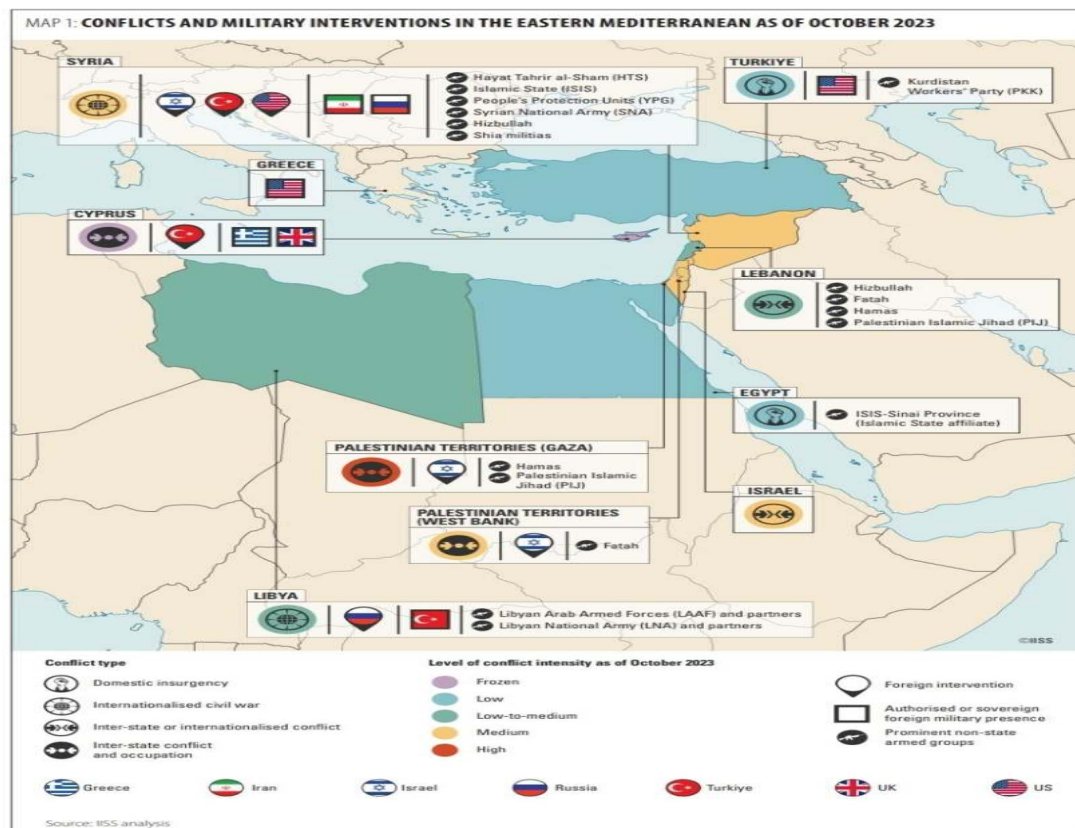
*Figure 1. Conflicts and military interventions in the EM as of October 2023.[4]*

2. ***External powers.*** The US is central to the region due to its military presence, legacy in the [Abraham Accords](), and mediation efforts. Meanwhile, the EU is seen as divided, contested, structurally weak, and diplomatically ineffective, leaving NATO as the more relevant Western organisation. Although Russia and China have economic and military stakes in the EM, they remain secondary actors. Gulf states' involvement has shifted to a geo-economic and opportunistic approach rather than ideological or geopolitical influence.

3. ***Energy outlook.*** Geoeconomic competition is intensifying as EM countries vie to be key nodes in connectivity projects linking Asia and Europe. However, the cooperation required to boost regional states' collective offer is still rudimentary at best. While energy resources are vital for EM economies, their global importance is limited. The EU's green transition further reduces

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[4] International Institute for Strategic Studies. 2023. Turbulence in the Eastern Mediterranean: Geopolitical, Security, and Energy Dynamics. Strategic Dossier Preview. [https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/strategic-dossier-preview-turbulence-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/](https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/strategic-dossier-preview-turbulence-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/) Access: 2024/11/18.

opportunities for EM gas, with only Egypt having a clear renewable energy strategy.

4. *Defence trends.* Defence modernisation is widespread amongst regional powers like Greece, Türkiye, Egypt, and Israel, focusing on air and sea domains. While this has shifted dynamics – such as Greece's acquisition of F-35 fighters – the region's defence cooperation remains inconsistent, with trilateral mechanisms (e.g., Cyprus-Greece-Israel and Cyprus-Egypt-Greece) lacking the depth to form formal alliances.

5. *Impact of Trump.*[5] While US military presence globally is a constant, what is variable and likely to greatly influence the contentious dynamics of the region given the recent re-election of Trump – and based on his previous administration's record – is Trump's transactional approach, his 'Only Israel' approach to the region, and the containment of Iran.

The EM remains a region marked by intense geopolitical competition, unresolved conflicts, and missed opportunities for cooperative growth, while the ongoing contention and conflict in the Red Sea is likely to exacerbate already existing geopolitical tension. Considering the expansion of the BRICS grouping[6] to include states concentrated around the Arabian Peninsula and Horn of Africa, and the advancement of the BRI, the EM's dynamics are likely to extend beyond its traditional state-based and terracentric designation to influence a broader emerging terraqueous region that would include Horn states, Gulf states, EM states, involved external powers, and an array of non-state actors.

## The ebb and flow of the Law of the Sea

'Watch this space,' said Vishal Surbun of the present conjuncture in which maritime international law finds itself. Thirty years since the establishment of the [International Tribunal of the Law of the Sea](#) (ITLOS), as mandated by the [UNCLOS'82](#), the granular ocean governance legal regime has witnessed many successes. However, questions of African maritime sustainable economic development and of the in-/flexibility of legal frameworks remain salient issue areas.

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[5] See [Panel 2](#) discussion and the reference to the Trump factor.

[6] See also Sanusha Naidu's elaboration on 'the Kazan moment' ([Panel 2](#)).

Historically, the oceans were viewed as spaces with inexhaustible fisheries and marine resources. In 1958, the processual development of the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), kickstarted in Geneva, culminated in the fourth UNCLOS of 1982 which mandated ITLOS that entered into force in 1994. Since then, the nexus of issues relating to climate change and concerns about environmental degradation and unsustainable economic development has found expression in the ocean governance regime, though gaps remain. Surbun noted that a shortened collation of these challenges and gaps can be found in the report of the UN Secretary-General on oceans and the law of the sea.[7] Over 50 intergovernmental organisations produced detailed reports as annexes to that report.

Some challenges and recent developments have included the development of a new regulatory framework for exploiting mineral resources in the deep seabed area that extends beyond the continental shelf of coastal states (the Area) that was triggered by an application by the Nauru government in 2021 for the exploration of the Area. The International Seabed Authority (ISA), which manages the regulatory framework of the international seabed, has yet to formulate the regulations for exploiting the floor of the high seas beyond national jurisdictions. While there is large public interest in the exploitation of minerals in the Area, some states are pushing for a precautionary pause, citing insufficient scientific and legal preparedness when it comes to the deep seabed. In the realm of maritime law, the present moment is something of a heyday for researchers of the Law of the Sea. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty, which was drafted in March 2023 and signed into effect in September of the same year, aims to further international cooperation and coordination, in line with UNCLOS, and addresses four main areas: [8]

- Marine genetic resources, including the fair and equitable sharing of benefits

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[7] United Nations General Assembly. 2024. Oceans and the law of the sea: Report of the Secretary-General, A/79/340.
https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n24/258/91/pdf/n2425891.pdf. Access: 2024/11/18.

[8] United Nations General Assembly. 2024. Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction, A/78/L.102*. https://www.un.org/bbnjagreement/en. Access: 2024/11/18.

- Measures such as area-based management tools, including marine protected areas
- Environmental impact assessments, and
- Capacity-building and the transfer of marine technology.

As the third implementing agreement to UNCLOS, the BBNJ has further applications on the deep seabed for living resources – and the question of how well these different legal frameworks are harmonised looms large. The subsequent question, then, is to ask how legal frameworks adapt. While UNCLOS, some would argue, is inflexible given the difficulties and scant opportunities to amend the so-called Constitution of the Sea, recent developments confront such charges, which include advisory opinions coming out of international tribunals.

In early 2024, ITLOS issued a non-binding advisory opinion on the issue of climate change, following state parties' questioning of their specific obligations to prevent, reduce, and control pollution of the marine environment in relation to the effects of greenhouse gas emissions on climate change. The advisory opinion of ITLOS included terms such as climate change that are not present in the UNCLOS treaty; however, a careful process of interpretation resulted in the advisory opinion reflecting contemporary concerns, by matching, for example, climate change and marine pollution. The gradual modernisation of the relatively old UNCLOS is certainly a feature of the development of UNCLOS. How legal frameworks develop through the issuing of advisory opinions is one key aspect to the question of the in-/flexibility of legal frameworks around ocean governance.

Surbun concluded his presentation with briefly elaboration on some underscoring principles that play into the adaptation of the UNCLOS legal framework. Here, the science-based legal frameworks for ocean governance, such as those in the ambit of the ISA and BBNJ, were developed. Science is a necessary element of effective and adaptive development of governance frameworks and implementation. The advisory opinion on climate change, for instance, mentions greenhouse gas emissions which relate to legal principles such as liability when it comes to anthropogenic climate change in the state-based international order. Another underscoring principle, referred to as 'due regard,' reflects the awareness of the drafters of UNCLOS that states would inevitably come to compete over important topics regarding the oceans. Article 87, for example, states that the exercise of

freedom in the high seas is subject to due regard. Such usage of 'soft' or open-ended language allows for a wider interpretation of the provisions of UNCLOS.

## Africa's 'blue' agency: from formulation to implementation

Speaking from Accra, Kathleen Ayensu, member of the African Union Commission on International Law (AUCIL), framed her presentation in terms of the contrast between COP 29, held in Baku in 2024, and UNCLOS III, held in Caracas in 1974. Her presentation illuminated both the difficulties of translating policy formulation into implementation and the present reality of competing priorities when it comes to Africa's stake in the development and practice of ocean governance, maritime security, and economic development – backgrounded by the urgent imperative of mitigating the looming catastrophe of the slowly unfolding climate crisis. The Lomé Charter of 2016 exemplifies her illumination: despite being perhaps the most sophisticated treaty of its kind worldwide, considering the scope of its maritime focus, only three ratifications have followed up on the 34 state signatories of 2016.

UNCLOS III (or UNCLOS'74), which followed in the wake of a wave of political decolonisation on the African continent, was an optimistic moment for Africa. The concept of exclusive economic zones (EEZs) emerged for the most part from the African bloc and its participation in UNCLOS, abetted largely by oil-rich Venezuela's sponsoring of a sizeable 'third world' bloc at the Caracas convention in 1974.[9] For Ayensu, this collaborative effort was a significant factor in shaping Africa's interest, and that of the third world, in terms of the direction the Law of the Sea would take. The old order of the oceans, Africa said, would not serve our purpose.

Vishal Surbun reiterated Ayensu's indication of this optimistic period of African agency, pointing to the present advocacy of Africa's ambition for a continental EEZ or Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone of Africa (CEMZA). This, he argues, fits on one end of the spectrum of ocean governance models elucidated by Fernando Bastos (2012).[10] On one side of the spectrum, there is community management of ocean spaces through a supranational authority independent from states; at the

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[9]  See Egede, E. 2023. UN82: Africa's contributions to the development of modern law of the sea 40 years later. *Marine Policy,* 148:1-8.

[10]  Bastos, F.L. 2012. The governance models for oceans and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. *South African Yearbook of International Law*, 37: 110-130. https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/SAYIL/article/view/11976.

other end is 'cooperation amongst the states concerned, including through international intergovernmental organisations, as an expression of a reconciliation between the individual interests and the collective interests of the states' (Bastos 2012: 113).

> There are six different models of governance that Bastos (2012: 113) presents, each differing 'in the nature and intensity of the cooperation amongst states, and the necessity of creating an international entity with powers independent of the intervention of individual states'. Vishal Surbun focused on the options at each end of the spectrum, (1) and (6).

The advocacy in the [2050 Africa Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy](#) for a CEMZA[11] clearly falls within the community management side of Bastos's framework. Yet, the persistence of state-centrism in international relations, and how this conveniently leads to governance regimes that rely on parallel individual interests, or momentary convergence, makes for a situation wherein the adoption of community management, or supranational governance models, sinks beneath the waves of the present legal regime where custom and treaties reflect the will of states.

Unfortunately, fifty years after UNCLOS III, the 2024 UN Climate Conference – COP 29, hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan – the much earlier optimism gave way to pessimism. Papua New Guinea's non-attendance symbolised a general loss of faith in the COP, which increasingly has come to be seen as little more than a talk shop: where are we going? what are we doing? how can we translate the 'words' of COP to tackle the reality of climate change? The watchword has also changed between the two events: in 1974, 'oceans' was a central construct; in 2024, that became 'climate change'. In African seas, piracy seems to have returned to the Red Sea area, after a brief stint in the Gulf of Guinea; illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing remains problematic and will become a crisis if rivers are not maintained properly; the Mediterranean and the coast of Senegal have become graveyards for those in search of a better life; and infrastructure and the mostly foreign financing thereof are taking on new dimensions and undergoing (uneven) restructuring along the continent's coastline. Given the necessity for socioeconomic upliftment on the African continent, and the pathway thereto availed by the potential exploitation of maritime resources and the EEZs, the realities of climate change and the

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[11] See Egede, E. 2023. UNCLOS 82: Africa's contributions to the development of modern law of the sea 40 years later. *Marine Policy*, 148. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2022.105463

concomitant necessity for mitigating its effects makes for a situation where 'we are on a collision course with ourselves.' In reference to the example of the exploitation of the North Sea's oil resources, Ayensu remarked that those 'who pontificate to Africa are preposterous'. Adding to this sense of pessimism was the recent success of the Trump campaign in the US and the high likelihood of the Trump administration's opposition to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinion on climate change, expected in 2025.[12]

However, Ayensu's seeming pessimism was tempered with her noting that there are African successes. Egypt's expansion of the Suez Canal was one hundred per cent financed by Egypt and the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) was eighty per cent financed by the Ethiopian government (with the top-up coming from the Chinese government). The opening of the Dangote Refinery in Lekki, Nigeria represents the need and drive to process our own resources on the continent, for export. With respect to energy, Ayensu pointed to the damming of several African rivers, the Grand Inga Dam project, the aspirations of the AU Agenda 2063, and the Lomé Charter of 2016 which stands as the most comprehensive maritime document on security, safety and development, 'warts and all'. But, 'more must be done'.[13]

## Towards a theory of ocean regions governance

Two principles continue to organise the discipline of international relations, in general, and ocean governance, in particular: sovereignty and territoriality. In considering ocean regions, or the regionalisation of oceans in academic and policy imaginaries, these two organising principles must be reconceptualised – moving away from both a statecentric paradigm to capture the transnational dimensions of ocean regions and away from terracentrism, towards a terraqueous paradigm. Oceans and ocean regions are not *spaces* of mere transit but *places* in their own right: places that defy strict applications of territoriality, are socially constructed, and which we understand through the role of settled populations, diasporas, and historical imaginaries.

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[12] Public hearings by the ICJ concluded on 13 December 2024, see here. A total of 96 States and 11 international organisations made oral presentations.

[13] In the final panel discussion, Ayensu suggested the need to have a 'Commissioner of the Oceans' for the AU.

The presentation by Chris Alden and Licínia Simão[14] focused on IRT's contribution to ocean regions beyond the terracentric statism of prevailing frameworks. Building on Buzan and Weaver's idea of regional security complexes (RSC)[15] and Borgese's work on maritime governance, Alden identified four main components that are key to conceptualising ocean region governance.

1. The extension of national sovereignty which is managed along the lines of the RSCs, but beyond the territorial-terrestrial circumscription. The key driver is state efforts, whether individually over EEZs or through collective agreement with other actors, to project power over fluidity of designated ocean regions. Important here are regional power distribution, norms convergence, and the degree of institutionalisation regulatory regimes.

2. The 'high seas' as areas for the common heritage of mankind (CHM), available to state and non-state actors (NSAs), subject to great power dynamics, and coupled to strategies of international cooperation to manage transnational security, economic, and development issues. Here, the key driver is collective action by groups of states and other NSAs to enhance outcomes in a poorly regulated aquaterreous domain where the reach of international law is nominal.

> RSCs are substructures of the anarchical international system, and they mediate the dynamics of great power competition; as such they stretch beyond realist or liberal thinking. Still, regional powers — states — 'define the polarity of any given RSC' (Buzan and Wæver 2003: 37). Such as Brazil in the South American RSC and South Africa in the Southern African RSC. Importantly, RSCs were originally conceived in terracentric terms, leaving oceans outside of the region status — this sea-blindness is the lacuna homed in on by Alden.

The following two components focus on the transnationalism beholden to ocean regions, which stands as a metaphor of oceanic currents running at the surface and in deep waters. The cross-currents of human migration and deep currents of marine ecosystems are interlinked here but, in terms of conceptualising governance, can be analytically distinguished as follows:

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[14] Based on a paper developed together with Maxi Schoeman.

[15] See Buzan, B. and Wæver, O. 2003. *Regions and Powers: The Structure of the International Security.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.)

3. Oceans governance in respect of transnationalism and human migration exhibits Amitav Acharya's multiplex[16] concept. Here, a variety of governance strands, from classic sovereignty and citizenship to normative regimes of conduct and geopolitics, avail themselves as options for an array of established and emerging actors. Diasporas can be thought of as socially constructed 'archipelagos' scattered across the globe and bound by the cross-currents of historical imaginaries, kinship bonds, and community networks.

> In a multiplex world, elements of the liberal international order continue to survive but are subsumed in a complex of crosscutting orders, generally regionally based; a variety of actors contribute to the creation of the rules and tackle transnational issues of security, climate change, and human rights.

4. The 'deep currents' of the aquaterreous domain, where marine ecosystems – including migration of plants, fish and animals, geological phenomenon impact on ocean regions – interlink with the cross-currents of human impact, exhibiting the constitutive relationship between humans and non-humans. Governance here is stewardship, where the management of human impact on marine ecosystems prevails.

Alden and Simão's presentation built on these theoretical propositions in their overview of the Atlantic Basin and four initiatives that are contributing to region-building in the Atlantic – one ocean, many regions, and diasporic. Four initiatives in the Atlantic are key here:

1. The Zone of Peace Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) is the oldest, established in 1986. While fostering South-South cooperation, it faces challenges from differing regional capabilities and geopolitical rivalries, yet persists due to its low-cost, localised agenda.
2. The Platform of African Atlantic States (PAAS),[17] housed in Rabat, aims to promote a shared African Atlantic vision through security, economic cooperation, and sustainability. However, power imbalances and Morocco's national security focus limit its broader regional impact.

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

[17]  Also sometimes referred to as the African Atlantic States Process (AASP).

3. The Atlantic Centre in Portugal aims to promote defence capacity-building and political dialogue between Atlantic states, aiming also to address the North-South divide. Unfortunately, it seems to have exhausted its momentum, receiving less and less government support.

4. In addition, the establishment of the Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation (PAC), whose framework for region-building largely resembles or functionally mimics that of the Centre, possesses a greater gravity than does Portugal when it comes to attracting interest in participating in its Atlantic and southern Atlantic regional ambitions.

PAC is the youngest of the initiatives. A civilian-led forum prioritising environmental and scientific collaboration on the basis of an ocean-centric agenda, it continues to remain influenced by state-driven interests and power asymmetries, with potential tensions between global and local priorities.

All four initiatives grapple with balancing territorial sovereignty, ocean governance, and regional cooperation in the context of global competition and environmental challenges. They further illustrate the need to reconceptualise governance, security, and cooperation with respect to ocean regions, which is precisely the target of intervention for Alden and Simão: 'towards a theory of ocean governance.' To be certain, translating this academic work into policy will be difficult, considering the prevailing terracentrism of the discipline and its practice, especially around the core (terracentic) assumptions of sovereignty and territory, as is evident in the Atlantic examples – but this translation is necessary.

Whether these four initiatives, which also stand as rhetorical devices for region-building, can be cohered and made compatible with one another will come to rely on the trajectory of geopolitics in the region.

## Concluding remarks

The broad scope of the session became even more apparent in the question-and-answer session that followed the presentations. The key concerns that emerged reflected stakeholders' (in the broadest sense of the term) notions of what is important in terms of the academic, practitioner, ideological, geopolitical, economic, normative, institutional, and legal dimensions of ocean regions. Civil society emerged as a key consideration in the development and practice of ocean

region governance, as did transnational advocacy and organisation. Questions of power, theory, and governance remained central, from rethinking classical geopolitical concepts, such as the theories of Mackinder and Mahan, to incorporating socially constructed perspectives that emphasise inclusivity and multilateralism. The renationalisation of global politics, coupled with emerging civilisational paradigms, underscores the tension between cooperation and competition in managing shared maritime resources. Africa's historical role in shaping the Law of the Sea is juxtaposed against its current struggles with uneven development, resource exploitation, and climate crises, as reflected in the slow progress of initiatives like AIMS 2050 and the Lomé Charter. The urgency of tackling climate change and ensuring equitable resource use is complicated by the dominance of state-centric practices, the long timelines of international lawmaking, and the political shifts on the global stage.

> Mackinder's heartland theory: Halford Mackinder argued that control of the central Eurasian Heartland is key to global dominance, as it offers strategic resources and central access to the world island. He famously stated, 'Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world.' Mackinder emphasised the importance of land power over sea power in shaping global politics.
>
> Mahan's sea power theory: Alfred Thayer Mahan believed that naval supremacy is crucial for a nation's global influence and economic success. He highlighted the importance of controlling strategic maritime routes, chokepoints, and overseas bases. Mahan argued that nations with powerful navies and access to trade routes could dominate international affairs.

As we stand at a crossroads of maritime governance, the need to conceptualise solutions across disciplines and scales remains paramount. The ocean, with its vast interconnectivity, challenges us to innovate frameworks that balance material realities with evolving societal and environmental imperatives.

> *In this critical 'weeks-where-decades-happen' moment for maritime law, the colloquium underscores both the promise and the daunting complexities of crafting a sustainable and inclusive future for our oceans.*

## KEY POINTS

- **Geopolitical and legal dimensions of ocean governance**. The colloquium explored ocean regions through geopolitics, geoeconomics, and international law, with emphasis on actors, challenges, and the adaptation of legal frameworks, especially UNCLOS and emerging treaties like the BBNJ.

- **Eastern Mediterranean as case study.** The region embodies global geopolitical tensions, featuring energy competition, military modernisation, and significant external involvement (e.g., US, EU, Russia, China, Gulf states), amidst unresolved conflicts and fragile cooperation.

- **Challenges in ocean law and governance.** Vishal Surbun highlighted gaps in UNCLOS, such as the regulation of deep seabed mining and adapting legal frameworks to climate change. Developments like the BBNJ treaty show progress but emphasise the need for harmonisation and flexibility.

- **Africa's maritime aspirations.** Kathleen Ayensu spotlighted Africa's maritime potential through frameworks like the Lomé Charter and CEMZA, yet lamented limited implementation due to climate challenges, governance issues, and external pressures.

- **Theoretical advances in ocean governance.** Chris Alden and Licínia Simão proposed a shift from terracentrism to a terraqueous approach in International Relations theory, emphasising the governance of ocean regions as dynamic spaces shaped by transnational and ecological factors.

# PANEL 2 | BRICS, G20, Oceans 20 (O20)

*Chair:*        Dr Yu-Shan Wu (University of Pretoria)

*Speakers:*      Dr Emmanuel Matambo (University of Johannesburg), Prof. Francois Vreÿ (Stellenbosch University), Jana de Kluiver (Institute for Security Studies), Sanusha Naidu (Institute for Global Dialogue)

*Rapporteur:*  Adam Louw

## Introduction

The original five BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa – are all coastal states, each with extensive coastlines. The accession of the so-called BRICS+ countries – Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates – contributes to the total coastline of the BRICS+ (though Ethiopia bucks this trend). BRICS is moving towards a maritime focus, albeit slowly, supported by its Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology, which planned to complete a draft roadmap by the end of 2024. But the pace of this turn towards a 'Blue BRICS' is skittish, and the broader question of the direction or trajectory of BRICS expansion looms large. The Group of 20 (G20), like BRICS, enjoys an extensive collective coastline and, contra BRICS, has taken steps to integrate a maritime agenda, launching the Oceans 20 (O20) in 2024. Notably, several BRICS countries form part of the G20.

> *To be sure, the multilateral architecture of global governance contours the aquaterrain in which the search for consensus on common maritime and ocean governance agendas plays out.*

Speakers were asked to discuss the following topics:

- What are the implications of an expanded BRICS (BRICS+) for the governance of ocean regions?
- What role can the G20 and O20 play in shaping the future of ocean regions?
- How can the UN Pact for the Future be leveraged regarding oceanic and maritime challenges and opportunities?

The presentations by Emmanuel Matambo, Francois Vreÿ, and Sanusha Naidu spoke to different facets of the role of BRICS in the context of ocean governance and its scant attention to a maritime agenda, while Jana de Kluiver's focus was on the G20. Both the notions of Blue BRICS and O20, as the oceanic modalities of the respective 'minilateralisms' came to the fore in this session.

> Minilateralism is a term coined by the former editor-in-chief of *Foreign Policy*, Moisés Naím,[18] who writes, 'By minilateralism, I mean a smarter, more targeted approach: We should bring to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem.'

Questions around the role of these minilateral fora in the multilateral architecture of the liberal international order, especially around the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development[19] (again discussed by UN member states at the Summit of the Future on 22 and 23 September 2024) also emerged as a key area of concern, especially in the near future when the Trump administration enters office.

## BRICS(+): From a club to...?

The recent expansion of the BRICS(+) begs the question of its developmental trajectory. Francois Vreÿ's presentation focused on the geography of BRICS+ circa 2025, focusing on the question of the tension between integration and dispersed regionalism when it comes to the ambitions of BRICS as a southern economic block and competing pole in a future multipolar world order. Vreÿ explored two possible trajectories for the Blue BRICS. The first is block integration and builds on the BRICS development scenarios presented by Andrey Shapenko and colleagues.[20] The second is dispersed regionalism.

The block integration scenario envisions a progression from a loosely organised group addressing global issues to an expanded, politically aligned bloc (BRICS+) with comprehensive maritime agendas focusing on the blue economy, security, and justice. At its most advanced stage, BRICS+ would act as a trusted maritime security provider addressing global challenges. Presently, it lies between early expansion and limited maritime cooperation.

> It is noteworthy that bi- and trilateral naval exercises between BRICS member countries have taken place, such as Mosi I and II, in 2019 and 2023, between China, Russia, and South Africa in the Indian Ocean; and the Sea (or Maritime) Security Belt-2024 in the Gulf of Oman between Iran, Russia, and China. Since 2019, nine of these joint naval exercises have taken place, with six of them in 2024 alone.

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[18] See Naím, M. 2009. Minilateralism. *Foreign Policy*, 173: 135-6. Available here.

[19] Available here.

[20] Shapenko et al. 2014. Imagine BRICS: Four scenarios for the future. *BRICS Business Magazine*, 4(8). Available here.

The second trajectory, dispersed regionalism, proposes the development of regional oceanic hubs led by BRICS+ members, each specialising in areas suited to their geographic context, and fostering partnerships with regional stakeholders (see Table 1).

*Table 1. A Blue BRICS+: Mastering dispersed regionalism[21]*

| Hub Location | Lead BRICS Member(s) | Geographic Focus | Key Specializations | Potential Regional Partners |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Indian Ocean Hub | India | Indian Ocean, South Asia | Anti-piracy, maritime trade security, disaster response | Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN, SAARC |
| South Atlantic Hub | Brazil | South Atlantic, Latin America | Anti-smuggling, sustainable fishing, marine biodiversity protection | Mercosur, ZOPACAS, Latin American states |
| Arctic Hub | Russia | Arctic Ocean, North Atlantic | Arctic resource management, environmental security, search & rescue | Arctic Council, Northern Sea Route partners |
| East African Hub | South Africa, Ethiopia | Southern Africa, East Africa, Horn of Africa | Anti-piracy, port security, regional logistics | African Union, Southern African Development Community (SADC) |
| Persian Gulf Hub | UAE, Iran | Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea | Counter-terrorism, anti-smuggling, energy infrastructure security | Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League |
| Red Sea Hub | Egypt, Ethiopia | Red Sea, Suez Canal | Trade route security, counter-trafficking, environmental management | African Union, Arab League, Horn of Africa partners |
| Western Pacific Hub | China | Western Pacific, South China Sea | Freedom of navigation, trade route security, environmental monitoring | ASEAN, APEC |

## The Kazan moment

In all the above scenarios, the question of whether BRICS+ would be a competitive or cooperative maritime security bloc, or integrate into the liberal maritime security governance order, looms large. Sanusha Naidu spoke with a focus on the new BRICS+ entrants clustered around the Horn of Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the greater Red Sea area. In particular, she, like Vreÿ, called attention to the stark absence of a clear maritime agenda in BRICS(+). Paragraph 13 of the Kazan Declaration[22] 'stress[es] the universal and inclusive nature' of Agenda 2030, though the same paragraph emphasises the importance of respecting national priorities and 'condemn[s] the attempts to subject development to discriminatory politically motivated practices.' The fourteenth paragraph 'underscore[s] the key role of the G20 as the premier global forum for multilateral economic and financial

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[21] Permission for replication granted by Francois Vreÿ, adapted from Shapenko et al. 2014., available here.

[22] BRICS. 2024. Kazan Declaration. Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security. https://dirco.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/XVI-BRICS-Summit-Kazan-Declaration-23-October-2024.pdf Access: 2024/11/18.

cooperation' and endorses the role played by the consecutive presidencies of the BRICS member states (India, Brazil, and South Africa) in both 'the continued and productive functioning of the G20' and, importantly, in enhancing inclusiveness and amplifying the voice of the Global South. The latter is especially important in light of the AU's inclusion into the G20 following the New Delhi Summit in 2023. Paragraph 90 makes mention of the 'critical importance of the oceans for sustainable development and climate stability' and paragraph 112 of 'ocean and polar sciences' in respect of the 'importance of science, technology and innovation as a critical catalyst for economic development and improved quality of life of the people in the BRICS nations.' Maritime security is not spoken to in the Declaration and thus falls under the broad peace and security rubric.

Naidu averred that the expansion of BRICS will cause it to become clearer and more coherent on matters of maritime security. This is especially important, given the geography of the new entrants and the 'heating up' of the Red Sea – an aquaterreous region that includes Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE, and is linked to the EM. Strategic maritime chokepoints, their engagement, and the subsequent effects thereof on access to commercial trade routes will inevitably come to mediate the development of a maritime agenda that follows the expansion of BRICS. Regional actors' contestation over access to ports clustered around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait will also play into the management of new entrants in the BRICS grouping. Naidu remarked that, for those who closely watched the developments leading to the Kazan Summit, Saudi Arabia's hesitation to commit fully to BRICS is evidence of deepening geopolitical dislocation and instability.

The challenge for BRICS in this regard is based on the deference of oceans governance to other structures in BRICS, and due to the various sub-regional groupings, such as India-Brazil-South Africa, the tri- and bilateral naval exercises amongst BRICS countries, the BRI, the G20, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and China's dialogue partner status therein (backgrounded by growing tension between India and China). Clashing and divergent priorities that emerge from these sub-regional arrangements detract from achieving a broad BRICS consensus on matters of the seas. Yet, Naidu argues, this allows for consensus searching outside of BRICS, mainly through the G20. The UAE's economic clout in the region, while not being a member of the G20, allows it to position itself, as a

BRICS+ member, in ways that make the maritime agenda far more compelling for BRICS to consider.

> *For now, the proverbial can will be kicked down the road – allowing for the nascent development of a common maritime agenda through sub-regional arrangements involving BRICS+ countries, and for BRICS as BRICS to focus on the political task of general expansion.*

## G20 turns to the seas

Both BRICS+ and the G20 are informal fora, with neither having a secretariat or binding enforcement mechanisms. Yet, the progress made by the G20 in the maritime domain in recent years outweighs that of BRICS+. While historically the G20 has dealt with issues of the ocean as a subset of discussions on climate change and environmental degradation, this has gradually changed, after the Rio+20 conference in 2012. In 2017, the German presidency of the group adopted the G20 Action Plan on Marine Litter, and this momentum was carried through to 2019 when, under Japan's presidency, the G20 Implementation Framework for Actions Against Marine Plastic Litter was established and the Osaka Blue Ocean Vision was agreed upon; in 2019, under Saudi Arabia, the Coral Research and Development Accelerator Platform was launched; in 2022, under Indonesia's presidency, the Ocean 20 Launch Event took place in Bali where various ocean-related issues were discussed and the Blue Economy was integrated into the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG) as a dedicated priority area. These developmental cycles would culminate in the launch of the O20:

> *'a historic milestone in recognizing the central role of the ocean in the global climate, energy, and environment agendas and that, despite being a global and interconnected ocean, it is plural in its characteristics.'[23]*

This drift toward the formalisation of an oceans agenda indicates the need for inclusive and nuanced governance approaches, and formalises the oceans' critical role in addressing climate change, environmental protection, and economic development. The O20 looks to foster international cooperation in order to promote an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable ocean economy. In addition to state contributions, funding will draw on resources already mobilised through the

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[23] G20. 2024. Oceans 20 (O20). https://www.g20.org/en/g20-social/engagement-groups/oceans-20-o20 Access: 2024/11/18.

UN Global Compact and additional efforts to leverage private sector engagement are ongoing. Unfortunately, securing funding avenues and mobilising financial resources are likely to be challenging in the present context of a crisis-ridden international political economy and the difficulty of aligning diverse and even clashing national and minilateral priorities and emerging commitments. Recent G20 meetings have been unable to produce joint communiques due to trade tensions and the invasion of Ukraine. Growing geopolitical tensions and concomitant great power politics contribute to these challenges, especially with regard to the growing tensions between the US and its allies, and China-Russia tension on the other side. With respect to the latter, collaborative efforts in the G20 may be met with scepticism by the US, especially as Russia and China, and the collective BRICS+ grouping, seek to expand their influence in the Global South, especially following the Kazan Summit.

While the G20 may be the right platform to advance the oceans agenda, sustaining momentum may present a challenge beyond Brazil's presidency in 2024, and especially since the US has not ratified UNCLOS. The G20 is a minilateral forum of states, now also including the AU, and represents a rich, populous, and extensively littoral and oceanic region. South Africa's assumption of the presidency in 2025 may face difficulties in accommodating such an ambitious agenda considering its limited resources, competing national priorities, and state capacity with respect to the oceans. Adding to these concerns is the intersection of two facts: the US will assume presidency of the G20 in 2026, and president-elect Donald Trump's critical stance on climate agreements and multilateral and international indicatives and agreements.

## The Trump card

Unfortunately, as Emmanuel Matambo pointed out, the present geopolitical conjuncture around the long-touted 'rise of China' and the recent re-election of Donald Trump bode ill for the mini- and multilateral governance of the maritime domain, with China-US relations remaining a proverbial bottleneck in cooperative ocean governance efforts. There has been slow progress in the 'blueification' of BRICS, as seen in Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology, and

collaboration on China's planned BRICS Deep-Sea Resources International Research Center.[24]

China's maritime activities are notably more pronounced than those of other BRICS nations, contributing to global naval competition, especially with the US. In 2016, the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum led to the Doha Declaration, promoting dialogue and unique dispute resolution methods amongst signatories of UNCLOS, differing from the Philippines's preference for UN arbitration. However, an arbitral tribunal in July 2016 ruled in favour of the Philippines, stating that China's claims, including the nine-dash line and land reclamation, violated international law.

With respect to the US presidency of the G20 in 2026, two aspects are important: the question of declining US participation in multilateral agreements, and the likelihood of worsening relations with China. Both aspects, individually *and* together, do not bode well for international cooperation on maritime security and ocean governance. Already, SDG 14 (the conservation and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development) is one of the least developed areas in Agenda 2030, and the Pact for the Future, 'created with the aim of strengthening cooperation between countries and intensifying efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda.'[25] Further progress may falter in light of geopolitical tensions between the US and its allies, on the one hand, and China and Russia on the other.

## Concluding remarks

In concluding a summary of this panel discussion, it is pertinent to bring up some of the elided but important aspects in the presentations posed by the audience. The discussions emphasised the complexities of placing oceans governance within the broader context of minilateral groupings like BRICS(+) and the G20. While oceans

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[24] Minister of Foreign Affairs, The People's Republic of China. 2024. Embracing a Broader View and Cutting Through the Fog of Challenges to Advance High-Quality Development of Greater BRICS Cooperation. [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202410/t20241023_11514804.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202410/t20241023_11514804.html) Access: 2024/11/18.

[25] SDG Watch Europe. 2024. United Nations adopts ground-breaking Pact for the Future to transform global governance. [https://sdgwatcheurope.org/united-nations-adopts-ground-breaking-pact-for-the-future-to-transform-global-governance/#:~:text=The%20Pact%20was%20created%20with,the%20international%20and%20national%20levels](https://sdgwatcheurope.org/united-nations-adopts-ground-breaking-pact-for-the-future-to-transform-global-governance/#:~:text=The%20Pact%20was%20created%20with,the%20international%20and%20national%20levels). Access: 2024/11/18.

governance has gained traction through critical issues like deep-sea mining and maritime security, its alignment with these frameworks highlights tensions between collaborative aspirations and fragmented realities. BRICS, as an informal grouping without a formal secretariat, faces significant challenges in achieving cohesion, particularly in maritime governance.

Questions about whether BRICS operates as a counter-hegemonic force or a status quo actor reflect ongoing debates about its identity and trajectory. The tensions between its anti-US rhetoric and internal fragmentation, especially regarding expansion and divergent national interests, complicate its ability to establish a unified maritime agenda. There is a need for agility and innovation in addressing ocean governance within a rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape. The rise of middle powers and the increasing entanglement of BRICS, G20, and the AU underscore the importance of non-monolithic and flexible approaches. As South Africa navigates its roles across BRICS, the AU, and the G20, its ability to reconcile competing national, regional, and global interests will be critical. Similarly, the discussions revealed the urgent need for clarity in defining the roles and contributions of groupings to ocean governance in a time of fragmentation and transition.

The broader crisis of the liberal international order (LIO) also surfaced as a key theme, with institutions like the UN and World Trade Organization (WTO) appearing increasingly paralysed. This environment has created opportunities for groups like BRICS to reframe governance models, though their success remains uncertain.

> *The Gramscian idea that 'the old is dying,' whether through transformation or degradation, invites new frameworks and perspectives for global governance, including in the maritime sphere.*

## KEY POINTS

- **BRICS(+)'s growing maritime focus.** BRICS countries are moving towards a maritime agenda, with initiatives like the Working Group on Ocean and Polar Science and Technology drafting a roadmap, which was anticipated to be completed by the end of 2024. However, progress towards a 'Blue BRICS' remains slow and fragmented. Maritime cooperation is limited, despite joint naval exercises and increasing attention to ocean governance.

- **G20's leadership in ocean governance.** The G20, unlike BRICS, has actively pursued a maritime agenda, exemplified by the Oceans 20 (O20) initiative. This formalisation integrates the oceans into discussions on climate, sustainability, and economic development, but geopolitical tensions and funding challenges could impede progress.

- **Geopolitical challenges for maritime cooperation**. The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency and the strained China-US relations present obstacles for cohesive international ocean governance. These dynamics could weaken collaborative efforts in multilateral platforms like the G20 and complicate the implementation of SDG 14 and the UN Pact for the Future.

- **Implications of BRICS(+) expansion**. The inclusion of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the UAE expands BRICS's geopolitical and maritime scope, especially around critical regions like the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. However, divergent regional priorities and sub-group dynamics hinder the creation of a unified maritime agenda within BRICS(+).

- **Two trajectories for BRICS+ maritime development**. Francois Vreÿ outlined two possible futures for Blue BRICS: (1) block integration, where BRICS+ evolves into a cohesive bloc addressing global maritime challenges, and (2) dispersed regionalism, where regional hubs led by BRICS+ members specialise in maritime governance. Current efforts lie between early expansion and limited cooperation.

# PANEL 3 | Small Island States

*Chair:*        Dr Pedro Seabra (ISCTE University Institute of Lisbon)

*Speakers:*     Prof. Valur Ingimundarson (University of Iceland), Raushan Adil (London School of Economics /Office of the President of Maldives), Daniela Marggraff (University of Pretoria), David Willima (Institute for Security Studies)

*Rapporteur:*   Tshegofatso Ramachela

## Introduction

The third panel discussion of the colloquium focused on the dynamics of small island states in the context of ocean geopolitics, the effects of climate change, maritime crime and blue economy opportunities. The main ocean regions included in the presentations were the Arctic Circle, the Pacific Ocean, and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where the latter two are otherwise known as the Indo-Pacific. Specific attention was paid to Iceland and the Maldives. Interestingly, despite the distance between the islands discussed, their distinct geographic regions and circumstances, island nations have something of a shared 'community-hood'. This can perhaps be attributed to the shared challenges they face, which include the impact of climate change, and the importance of the blue economies to island states.

Three questions that framed the input and discussions:

- What unique challenges do small island states face in the current global context?
- How are small island states navigating the complexities of great power contestation?
- What role can small island states play in addressing contemporary global challenges?

### The anatomy of small island states: does size matter?

From the outset, the complex realities of small island states was noted, as vastly distinct from the experiences of littoral and inland countries. Though they share some similarities, especially with respect to limited populous and the territorial composition of scattered islands, there are also nuanced differences, based on geographic region and the challenges encountered (see Figure 2). Further, the terms 'small island states' (nations) and 'small island developing states' (SIDS) are not synonymous. The former can be considered an umbrella term, whereas the term SIDS and microstates, for example, constitute categories under the broader rubric of small island states. SIDS typically refers to islands in the Global South, whose

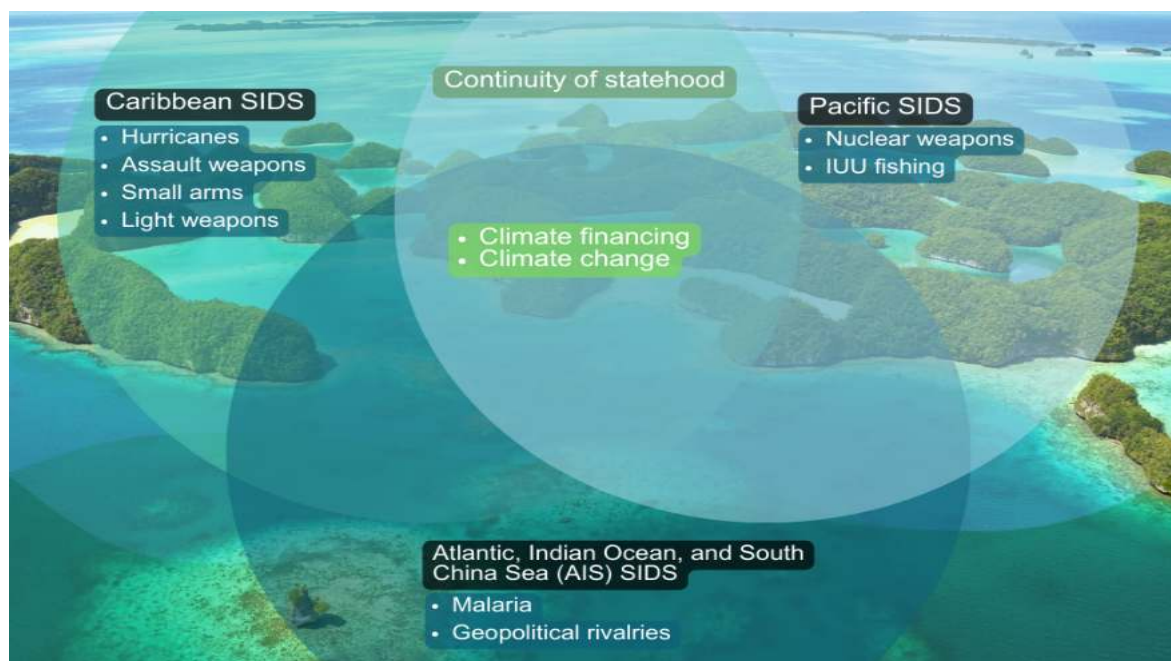socio-economic indicators range from low- to middle-income, and high-income for some SIDS in the Caribbean.[26]



*Figure 2. Recognising differences – an illustration of the shared challenges and distinct issues faced by SIDS*[27]

Typical of SIDS, their EEZs are larger than their landmass, in other words their land is limited, so too is their population and the size of their economies. This has served to reinforce the idea of such states as *small* because in a traditional realist view of international relations, a state's size is determined by its landmass and/or its population. In this sense, 'small' is a terra-centric concept, as Daniella Marggraff pointed out. However, if we were to consider the size of a state's oceanic territory as a determining factor, then the so-called small island states would not be small at all.

The concept of large ocean states is entering the lexicon, and scholars have begun to argue in favour of a new classification for SIDS.[28] Perhaps, based on the sheer

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[26] United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. 2021. Income, poverty and employment. Small Island Developing States DGFF2022. https://dgff2021.unctad.org/social-development-issues/income-poverty-and-employment/ Access: 2024/11/18.

[27] Presentation by Daniela Marggraff on 11 November 2024, Oceans and Ocean Regions Governance, Third Colloquium.

[28] Hume, A., Leape, J.,Oleson, K. L. L., Polk, E. Chand, K. and Dunbar, R. 2021. Toward an ocean-based large ocean states country classification. *Marine Policy* 134, 1-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104766

size of the territorial waters, SIDS should be referred to as large ocean states. This introduces a new paradigm through which to view these islands. It is not uncommon to find island nations vacillating between labelling themselves as Large Ocean States (LOS) or SIDS. The latter is used to highlight the vulnerabilities of island states and their populations, while the former, LOS, is used to emphasise the immense potential of island nations, their access to vast marine resources, and their stewardship over the oceans.

The sections below demonstrate that SIDS are far from being small, as evidenced by their ability to counter geopolitical dynamics, combat climate change, and assert their agency, despite their size.

## Small island states in the geopolitical seascapes

The first speaker, Valur Ingimundarson, drew attention to a region which often falls outside the purview of the African continent due to its distance from Africa, the Arctic Circle. The discussion centred on Iceland's place in the North Atlantic and Arctic geopolitics. The Arctic Circle, one of two polar regions, sits at the centre of mounting geopolitical contestation, both between states in the region, and those outside. While the above is true for the Arctic, Ingimundarson pointed out that the North Atlantic has not been the site of serious maritime disputes.

Key to note is that Iceland's maritime security is intricately linked to Western geostrategic and military interests in the North Atlantic. Albeit small, in terms of its landmass and relative to neighbours, Iceland bears the markers of a major player. Since 1949, Iceland has been a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and it has maintained a defence agreement with the United States since 1951.[29] It occupies a strategic position in the Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom (GIUK) gap, an area in the North Atlantic that forms a naval choke point with historic significance,[30] particularly in terms of the Cold War anti-submarine

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[29]Government of Iceland. n.d. Iceland and NATO. https://www.government.is/diplomatic-missions/permanent-delegation-of-iceland-to-nato/iceland-and-nato/#:~:text=Iceland%20has%20been%20a%20member,pillars%20of%20Iceland's%20security%20policy. Access: 2024/11/16.

[30]Childs, N. 2022. Gauging the gap: The Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom Gap – a strategic assessment. The International Institute for Security Studies.

warfare. Iceland is perceived to be a trans-Atlantic sea link of communication between the US and Europe.



*Figure 3. The GIUK gap – a naval chokepoint[31]*

A further testament to its important maritime role, both historically and presently, can be traced back to the Cold War when Iceland exploited its Western alignment to consolidate ownership of its maritime resources. This, along with its victory in the 1950s-1970s Anglo-Icelandic Cod Wars over fishing waters,[32] enabled it to gain sovereign control over its core maritime security issues, outside its military relations with its allies.

> Like Iceland, island nations in the Indo-Pacific region must also confront geopolitical competition between major players located within and outside the region. From the Maldives, Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), to the islands of Oceania, including but not limited to Tuvalu, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati, dealing with the interests of great powers vis-a-vis their own is a delicate balancing game.

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[31] Presentation by Valur Ingimurdarson on 11 November 2024 to the Oceans and Ocean Regions Third Colloquium.

[32] Bilms, K. 2023. The Cod Wars and lessons for maritime counterinsurgency. The US Naval Institute. https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/february/cod-wars-and-lessons-maritime-counterinsurgency Access: 2024/11/16.

Presently, the major players facing off against each other in the Indo-Pacific and the IOR, in particular, are China and India, with SIDS, like the Maldives, caught in a tug-of-war. This geopolitical rivalry – or what Marggraff terms the re-geopoliticisation and militarisation of island states – overshadow local priorities and, in essence, relegate local challenges to the periphery.

## The climate curse

Amidst navigating geopolitical dynamics in the maritime domain, island states must also tackle climate change. Often disproportionately affected, SIDS are forced to grapple with worsening climate-induced stress, with phenomena ranging from ocean acidification and coral bleaching to the spread of zoonotic diseases and coastal erosion. The combined effects of climate change pose a threat not only to marine ecosystems and biodiversity, but also to human security.

Climate change is often referred to as a threat multiplier because it exacerbates existing socio-economic and environmental issues, which is especially true in relation to ocean regions. The ocean acts as a carbon sink, absorbing excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, in essence regulating global warming. However, over time this process has led to disastrous consequences for island states. As greenhouse gases continue to increase at the current rate, the sea surface temperature of the Indian Ocean is expected to exceed 28 degrees Celsius by the end of the century. Science tells us that anything above 20 degrees Celsius will impact the oceanic environment, by worsening tropical cyclones and torrential rain.

Amongst the various issues, a clear and present danger facing most island states is rising sea levels. The present rate of sea level rise as a result of global warming and the melting glaciers threatens the very existence of SIDS. Panellists emphasised the need to consider and deliberate on the potential stateless futures of some island nations.[33]

Raushan Adi, originally from the Maldives, highlighted in her presentation the dire circumstances facing the nation. As the lowest-lying islands in the world, 80 per cent of the Maldives is projected to be uninhabitable by 2050.[34] The loss of territorial

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[33]See also Panel 4,  in particular the presentation by Lisa Otto.

[34]Ranjan, A. 2021. Rising sea levels: Threat for the Maldives. Institute of South Asian Studies. https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/rising-sea-levels-threat-for-the-maldives/ Access: 2024/11/17.

land mass will result in the loss of livelihoods and possibly a loss of identity and force millions from their homes, sever their bond to the land and create additional vulnerabilities. There are ongoing debates in academic and policy circles about whether a nation can be stripped of its statehood if it loses its entire landmass, as a result of climate change and rising sea levels. The 2023 Declaration on the Continuity of Statehood and the Protection of Persons in the Face of Climate Change-Related Sea-Level Rise, drafted on 6 August 2023 at the 52nd Pacific Island Forum, succinctly sums up and reaffirms the position of island states in Oceania.

## Blue crimes threaten maritime security and island livelihoods

In addition to climate change, SIDS are highly vulnerable to transnational organised crime at sea, which fall under the umbrella of 'blue crimes'. The Indian Ocean is a major transhipment hub and islands, such as Sri Lanka and the Maldives, are often used as transit points and have the difficult task of tackling drug trafficking. So too are Mauritius and Seychelles used as transit points. These island states are located along the so-called 'southern route' or 'smack track', a network of routes stretching the length of the Indian Ocean, used to facilitate the heroin trade.[35]

Monitoring and patrolling the vast stretch of waters is no mean feat, especially for island states. A common thread across island states seems to be the absence of a formalised military with standing armies and navies. Generally, most island states employ civilian agencies and their coast guards to perform naval and maritime constabulary duties such as surveillance and patrols. This is the case for Iceland, the Seychelles and many others. Other notable cooperative arrangements include the Indian Ocean Commission's (IOC) Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre (RMIFC) and the Regional Coordination of Operations Centre (RCOC)[36] which facilitate information gathering and the pooling of resources to respond to threats. However, even with such platforms the difficulties remain a lack of capacity, limited patrols, particularly in the Central Indian Ocean, and insufficient information sharing, which constrain maritime security efforts.

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[35]United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. 2024. Organised criminal networks linked with drug trafficking in the Eastern Indian Ocean Region. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/AOTP/Organised_Crime_Networks_Linked_with_Drug_Trafficking_in_the_Eastern_Indian_Ocean_Region_single_pages.pdf Access: 2024/11/17.

[36] This was also raising in the Panel 4 discussion.

Mauritius doesn't have an active military force, but it does have a small paramilitary force that includes a special mobile force (SMF), a national coast guard, and a police helicopter squadron. The SMF is a ground infantry unit that is part of the Mauritius Police Force, responsible for internal and external security, and involved in civic works projects. The SMF is trained in conventional military tactics, and some members are trained on commando lines. The National Coast Guard is a unit with four patrol craft that are used for search-and-rescue missions and to monitor territorial waters. The Police Helicopter Squadron is a unit of 100 members that assists with search-and-rescue operations.

### Island initiative(s) and creative agency

Island states have adopted a rigorous resourcefulness to offset their limited maritime security enforcement capabilities. As nations with limited maritime capabilities, they address complex maritime security challenges by using multilateral platforms for cooperative arrangements and partnerships, and to enhance their maritime reach.

Many islands, including those discussed here, secure their EEZs, combat smuggling, and protect their fish stocks from IUU fishing with assistance from regional and international partners. Island states in the IOR have turned to organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the EU-funded Maritime Security Programme (MASE), and many others for support. Similarly, in the North Atlantic-Arctic region, Iceland has used its strategic position to extract benefits from its alliances with the US and NATO.

> *An apt characterisation of this resourcefulness is what some scholars have referred to as creative agency.*

This agency of islands is particularly observable in the ways in which island states see and refer to themselves, for instance when they drift between calling themselves SIDS and LOS. The choice and shifting between these labels allow island states to reframe global narratives and address local challenges according to their needs. This is one of the many ways island states assert their will and demonstrate their ability to balance the competing interests of great powers with their own.

### Blue economy potential

Critical to island states is the blue economy and harnessing its potential. The blue economy has emerged as a sustainable way to harness the ocean's resources for

economic growth. According to African Union estimates, Africa's blue economy could generate roughly 300 billion USD and create around 49 million jobs.[37] The AU 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) has declared the blue economy to be the new frontier in sustainable development.[38]

To address the prevailing challenges and achieve blue economy objectives and sustainable development, a number of island-driven initiatives have emerged. David Willima discussed the merits of such initiatives with specific reference to the Great Blue Wall Initiative, an African-driven project born in the Western Indian Ocean.[39] Aimed at restoring marine ecosystems across Africa, the Great Blue Wall Initiative is informed by the experiences and challenges faced by small island states. It facilitates the role of African Western Indian Ocean island states in fostering partnerships for marine conservation and sustainable development. The initiative has four key pillars of action namely:

- Blue Planet: enhancing seascape governance
- Blue Nature: fostering nature-based solutions
- Blue People: catalysing a regenerative blue economy
- Blue Partnerships: connecting and collaborating across the region and beyond, and leveraging political momentum.

The Great Blue Wall Initiative is yet another example of the proactive approach adopted by island states. They are perhaps the staunchest proponents of the blue economy, continuously advocating for its promotion and preservation to contribute to sustainable development and improved community livelihoods. However, island community livelihoods remain under threat. The blue economies of island states, particularly those in the Indian Ocean, are heavily dependent on marine-based tourism and fisheries. These sectors are often hardest hit by blue crime, international crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as extreme weather

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[37]World Bank Group. 2022. Blue economy for resilient Africa programme (BE4RAP). https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/environment/brief/blue-economy-for-resilient-africa-program Access: 2024/11/18.

[38]African Union. 2022. Shaping a sustainable blue economy for Africa UN Oceans Conference side events. https://au.int/fr/node/41942#:~:text=African%20leaders%20dubbed%20the%20blue,aquifers%2C%20basins%2C%20watersheds%20etc. Access: 2024/11/18.

[39] Great Blue Wall: Accelerating and upscaling ocean conservation action in the Western Indian Ocean. https://www.greatbluewall.org/ Access: 2024/11/18.

conditions and natural disasters, reflecting the urgent need for SIDS to diversify their economies and prepare for severe conditions of climatic change.

## Concluding remarks

SIDS have demonstrated a remarkable level of agency and assertiveness in centring climate change and other local challenges on international security and development agendas. In this vein, a reassessment and redefinition of SIDS across different ocean regions and in the current geopolitical climate is necessary. In the context of climate action, there remain several hurdles to overcome, chief amongst them being the issue of climate finance, or rather the lack thereof. Furthermore, climate change, science-based knowledge and scientific capacity building should not be discounted. Island states can provide valuable insights based on their experiences in tackling the adverse effects of climate change. What is abundantly clear is that the experiences of and challenges faced by island states can no longer be sidelined.

## KEY POINTS

- **Intersecting threats and challenges.** Island states face a multiplicity of intersecting threats and challenges, ranging from climate change to transnational organised crime at sea.

- **Vulnerability and a high susceptibility to external shocks**. The impact of the prevailing threats on SIDS is compounded by their vulnerability, high susceptibility to external shocks and slow recovery from global crises owing to their relative geographic isolation.

- **Geopolitical competition.** Heightened geopolitical competition and increasing militarisation of the ocean space threatens to overshadow the priorities of island states. However, island states are increasingly finding unique methods to balance the interests of great powers and leverage their strategic position to shield themselves and extract benefits.

- **Unique agency and assertiveness.** Island nations possess a unique agency and assertiveness, and have proven that they are anything but small; now mindsets and discourse must transform to align with the visions of large ocean states.

- **Realising the full potential of the blue economy**. The blue economy potential of island nations is vast. However, there remain several constraints to its full realisation, including but not limited to the adverse effects of climate change, maritime crime and poor climate financing.

# PANEL 4 | The African Ocean(s) Domain

## Issues and Regional Perspectives (Part One)

*Chair:*       *Antony Bizos (University of Pretoria)*

*Speakers:*    *Prof. Lisa Otto (University of Johannesburg), Pascaline Alexandre (Strategic Communication and Competitive Intelligence Specialist), Tshegofatso Ramachela (University of Glasgow/University of Pretoria), and Raj Mohabeer (Indian Ocean Commission)*

*Rapporteur:*  *Dr Samuel Oyewole*

## Introduction

The panel explored the multidimensional nature of threats to the oceans, the blue economy, maritime security, and island nations and coastal communities in Africa and beyond. These include the threats of climate change, violence at sea, illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, smuggling and contraband at sea, cyber criminality, weapon proliferation, human trafficking at sea, and maritime pollution. In addressing these challenges, the panel highlighted the roles, prospects and challenges of international law, African agencies, regional cooperation and security architectures, foreign powers, and emerging technologies such as the use of drones in maritime domain awareness (MDA). In general, the panel input was framed around the following questions:

- What are the main threats to Africa's oceans/ocean regions?
- What is the nexus between the blue economy and security?
- How does Africa perceive 'Atlantic Africa' and the Western Indian Ocean?
- What is the extent of external involvement in the continent's oceans?
- How should armed conflict and non-traditional threats in these regions be addressed?

### The threats of climate change at sea

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to the planet and its ability to sustain humanity in modern times. The oceans account for about 71 per cent of the earth's surface.[40] Hence, the effects of climate change at sea cannot be ignored.

> *The maritime domain is critical to the climate debates, as the principal theatre where climate change plays out.*

Lisa Otto explored the implications of climate change at sea on territoriality and statehood, especially for small island nations. The heating effects of human-produced greenhouse gases have increased, while the ice coverage of the Arctic Ocean has sharply declined. The combined effect is an alarming increase in carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events, such as

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[40]National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, How much water is in the ocean? https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/oceanwater.html#:~:text=The%20ocean%20covers%20more%20than,in%20glaciers%20and%20ice%20caps.

cyclones and typhoons.[41] Climate change poses wider threats to the environment, economy, territory, identity, and statehood. Otto emphasised the loss of territory as a hard security threat for small island nations that are the most vulnerable to climate change, the effects on their immediate neighbours and the wider members of the international community. This reflects some of the concerns raised by the earlier discussion on small island nations.

Despite the emerging challenges, current international law does not adequately account for concerns around statehood and migration. Based on the [Montevideo Convention](#) and other international legal statutes, territory is understood as land, and ocean territory is contingent on the existence of land territory. Hence, artificial islands cannot generate sea territory, which must be linked to existing territory. Moreover, there is an emerging debate around the statehood and identity of vulnerable small island nations, such as the Maldives and Tuvalu, amongst others.

Loss of territory due to climate change is recognised by Otto to be challenging our current understanding of migration. This has inspired debates around climate refugees, environmentally displaced persons, and statelessness. These concepts of migration, which are in the main a result of armed conflict, have been readapted into the emerging situation of climate-threatened small island developing states (SIDS) and peoples.

## Threats at/from the seas in Africa

Beyond climate change, there are many other threats to, at, and from the ocean. Maritime security is critical to unlocking and realising the benefits of the blue economy in Africa and beyond. Drawing from the various data sources and using geospatial analysis, Raj Mohabeer examined various threats to maritime security and the blue economy in the Western Indian Ocean (see Figure 4).

Violence at sea is one of the prominent threats to maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean. This includes armed robbery and conflict, the extension of the Yemen conflict, piracy, retaliation against fishermen, and terrorism at sea. IUU fishing is another major threat to maritime security in the region. It is connected to disputes of jurisdiction, organised criminal networks, poaching, and regulatory infringement.

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[41]United Nations, State of the global climate 2022.
 [https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6d9fcb0709f64904aee371eac09afbdf_N](https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/6d9fcb0709f64904aee371eac09afbdf_N). Access: 2024/11/20.

Moreover, the sea is a theatre of drug wars, employed by criminals to transport narcotics, which state authorities constantly battle to intercept and seize. Mohabeer presented a geospatial analysis of major drug seizures and routes at sea for bhang, amphetamines, hashish, cocaine, heroin, khat, opium and other varieties of narcotics in the region.

The Western Indian Ocean is a theatre for irregular migration at sea, human trafficking at sea, as well as smuggling of timber and wildlife, including protected animal species, such as abalone, fins, ivory, seabirds, tigers, and turtles. Mohabeer's geospatial analysis highlighted the sea routes for such smuggling in timber and various animal species, as well as irregular migration and human trafficking at sea (see Figure 4 below).

The region has further recorded other forms of threatening maritime incidents, including cyber criminality, illness, accident, crime at sea, COVID-19, inter-state conflicts and their effects, deaths due to poisonous marine food, and the re-entry of space debris. Examples of cyber criminality include a disruptive attack against a container at the port of Cape Town, South Africa in 2021 and two different attacks targeted at an Iranian port in 2020. Tanzania, Madagascar and the Comoros are some of the countries that have experienced death due to poisonous marine food, while Bahrain-Qatar tensions have led to the seizure of boats and fishermen on both sides. The re-entry of space debris at sea, such as rockets and satellites, is also a major threat in the Western Indian Ocean.
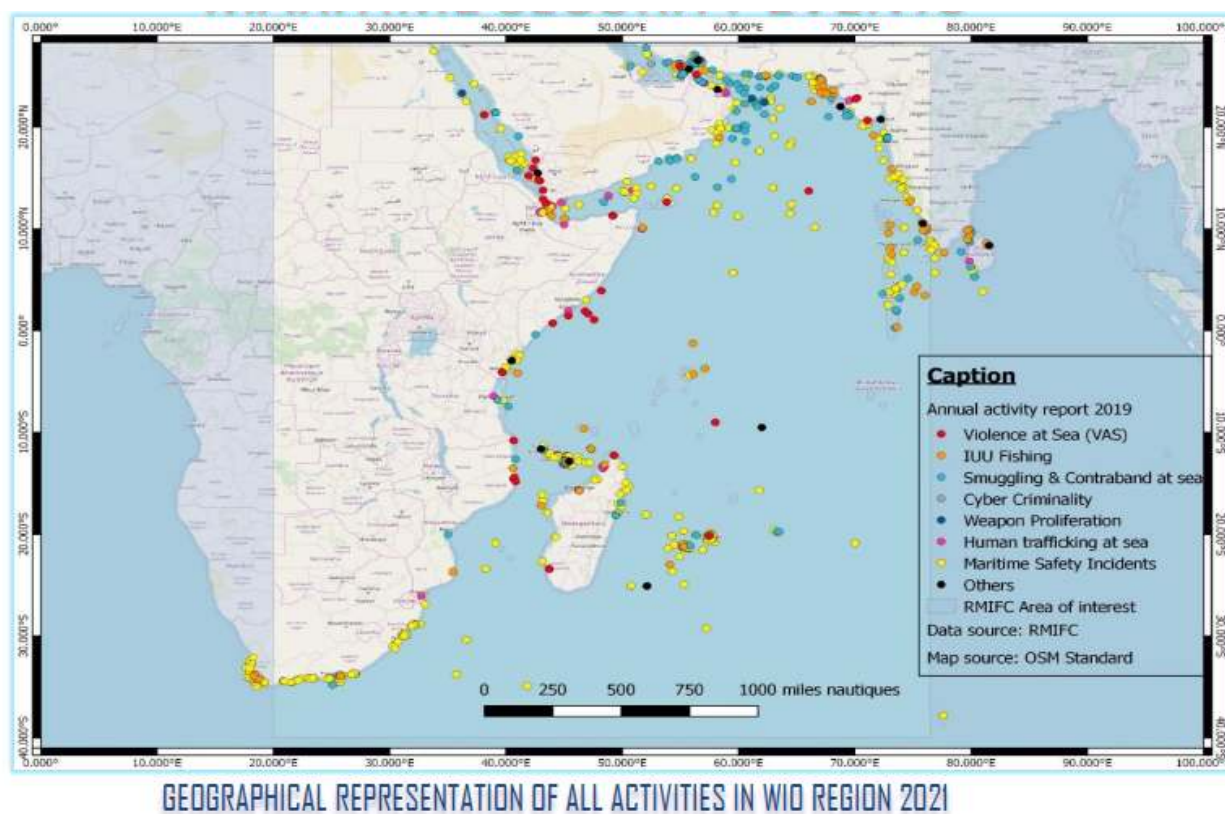
GEOGRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION OF ALL ACTIVITIES IN WIO REGION 2021

*Figure 4. Maritime security events in Western Indian Ocean[42]*

Raj Mohabeer showed that threatening maritime incidents have been on the rise in the Western Indian Ocean region.

> As shown in the presentation, yearly events rose from 640 in 2017 to 752 in 2018, 870 in 2019, 1076 in 2020, and 1167 in 2021. Out of the recorded cases in 2021, there were 50 cases of violence at sea, 257 cases of smuggling and contraband, 495 cases of maritime incidents, 127 cases of IUU fishing, one cyber criminality, 174 cases of human trafficking, 54 cases of marine environmental issues, and nine other cases.

Nevertheless, Mohabeer recognised this record as the tip of the iceberg, considering the underreporting of cases and the growing risk with the increasing traffic.

The threats to maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean region cannot be ignored by Africa and the rest of the world for many reasons, of which the blue economy is the principal reason. Notably, 38 of the 54 African countries are coastal and the maritime zone of the continent constitutes 13 million km², that is, nearly half

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[42]Presentation by Raj Mohabeer on 12 November 2024 to the Oceans and Ocean Regions Governance, Third Colloquium.

of its land area.[43] More than 90 per cent of Africa's imports and exports of goods are also conducted via sea. Globally, the ocean economy is worth more than USD 2.5 trillion, as in 2018.[44] However, the economic potential of the oceans remains yet to be fully explored and realised.

Further, the geo-economic importance of the Western Indian Ocean makes it impossible to ignore maritime security threats in the region. It is a vital bridge for East-West trade relations, which is critical for the global economy. The route accounts for 50 per cent of world oil transport and 40 per cent of gas shipment. It accounts for 30 per cent of world trade and 50 per cent of container volume traffic.[45] Consequently, maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean is a matter of both regional and global concern.

## African agencies in maritime security

African institutions are built on the AU structure as a continental body, with eight regional economic communities. In addition, there are seven economic communities and three peace and security organisations that are recognised in Pascaline Alexandre's presentation. At a continental level, the AU has developed several relevant strategic frameworks, such as the Policy Framework and Reform Strategies for Fishing and Aquatics in Africa, AU Agenda 2063, Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS), the African Continental Free Trade Area (ACFTA), and the African Blue Economy Strategy. These are in addition to the Djibouti Code of Conduct and Jeddah Amendment, the SADC Maritime Security Strategy, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Integrated Maritime Strategy, and the MASE Agreements on Information Sharing and Exchange and Joint Operations at Sea.

At a global level, Alexandre recognised the role of the UN Security Council (UNSC) in the fight against piracy both along the east and west coasts of Africa. The UN

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[43]Vishal Surbun, Africa's combined exclusive maritime zone concept, Institute of Security Studies, 2021, https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/ar-32.pdf Access: 2024/11/20.

[44]UNCTAD, Ocean economy offers a $2.5 trillion export opportunity: UNCTAD report, 2021, https://unctad.org/news/ocean-economy-offers-25-trillion-export-opportunity-unctad-report Access: 2024/11/20.

[45]Talmiz Ahmad, Indian Ocean: By the numbers, *Frontline Magazine*, 7 March 2024, https://frontline.thehindu.com/world-affairs/indian-ocean-region-by-the-numbers-vital-hub-for-global-commerce-strategic-chokepoints-vast-oil-reserves/article67891133.ece Access: 2024/11/20.

encourages international support for the AU, and the coordination of efforts at subregional and national levels. Regional maritime security architecture on the west coast of Africa is built around the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) and its Interregional Coordination Centre (ICC), which are premised on the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and its Central African Regional Maritime Safety Centre (CRESMAC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the Central African Regional Maritime Safety Centre (CRESMAO). Each of these centres manages a Multinational Regional Coordination Centre (MRCC) which, in turn, coordinates the national Maritime Operations Centre (MOC). These initiatives are supported by international partners, including bilateral cooperation from France, the US, China, the UK, and India. Others include the European Union, G7, UN Agencies, the private sector, universities and think tanks.

Similar arrangements of regional and international partnerships for maritime security are found on the east coast of Africa. Active regional organisations in this domain include the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), with regional security infrastructure such as the Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (CGIMA), Special Protection Areas (SPAS), the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), and the Standing Maritime Committee of SADC (SMC SADC). Stakeholders in the region subscribe to regional maritime frameworks such as the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC), Regional Maritime Security Architecture (RMSA), the Association of Indian Ocean Ports (APIOI), and the Port Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa (PMAESA), as well as the Nairobi Convention and Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association (WIOMSA). These initiatives have been supported by the US, EU, India, China, Japan, INTERPOL, the International Maritime Organization (IOM), and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), amongst others.

Pascaline Alexandre in her presentation assessed progress in stakeholder collaboration, and amongst African agencies in maritime security. However, success stories are invariably not defined by their operational effectiveness, but by politics and strategies, such as the signing of MoUs, collaboration, and joint exercises and initiatives. This gap was addressed in Raj Mohabeer's presentation, which assessed the success record in some of these initiatives and their naval operations on the east

coast of Africa. Nevertheless, Alexandre recognised ownership and effectiveness of operations, human rights and the rule of law, competition and conflicting interests and initiatives, and coordination as some of the concerns and challenges of regional frameworks in maritime security in Africa. Tshegofatso Ramachela in her presentation also acknowledged the inadequate capacity of African states in maritime domain awareness as a major challenge to maritime security in the region.

### Addressing the challenges

The panel highlighted some of the measures and strategies that have been designed and deployed, or could be employed, to address the aforementioned challenges at sea. These include political, legal, institutional, strategic, and tactical responses. Otto examined the political and legal responses to the threat of climate change. Alexandre and Mohabeer explored the strategic frameworks and institutional responses to the multidimensional threats at sea around Africa, while Ramachela examined the prospects of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in maritime domain awareness and security on the continent.

### Political and legal responses to climate change

Otto's presentation recognised some political and legal options to addressing the question of identity and statehood for small island states that are faced with vanishing territory:

- First, nations ex-situ, where citizens live across the globe and sovereign rights are maintained and exercised from elsewhere.
- Second, staying afloat with floating cities, as opposed to landed occupation, and moving away from a tera-centric interpretation of statehood.
- Third, mass migration and collective resettlement. Although not always attractive or desirable because it requires the acceptance of a complete loss of statehood, and for climate migrants, finding a new welcoming home. Australia, New Zealand, and the UK are increasingly open to accepting such climate migrants from vulnerable small island states.
- Fourth, remedial territory, involving the provision of 'territory transferred from responsible to injured states as redress for climate change induced

deterritorialization'.[46] However, this requires significant political will on the part of responsible state.

- Fifth, the UN Trusteeship Council could be revived as a mechanism to assist in the administration of territories experiencing such transition and transformation in statehood.

In addition, Otto recognised emerging legal and political statecraft. These include initiatives such as those of Tuvalu to engrave perpetual statehood in its constitution, digitalise its sovereign territory, culture, history, and for its government to create a digital nation and negotiate climate asylum with Australia for its population. The emergence and activities of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) and the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) have also played major roles in advocating for international legal reform and political solutions to addressing the plights of vulnerable island nations in the face of climate change.

### Institutional and strategic responses

Alexandre recognised the need to strengthen African agencies in maritime security and to bring the AU into the forefront of the coordination. There is an overriding need to strengthen the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) and the Peace and Security Council (PSC), and to initiate a continental defence and security strategy for the maritime domain in Africa. These should be matched with the promotion of intra-Africa cooperation, coordinated cross-continent exchanges, political will and commitments, strengthened Regional Economic Communities (RECs), coordination with communities, and maritime diplomacy. Such initiatives should be accompanied by better maritime domain awareness, data sharing, joint naval patrol, and building on existing lessons learned, with state-regional coordination, and involvement of the private sector, civil society groups, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Mohabeer also recognised the need to monitor all vessels and check abnormal movement, punish maritime crimes, and respect the ocean. Linked is the argument of Ramachela on the need to improve maritime domain awareness using UAVs, otherwise known as drones. This capability is necessary for intelligence,

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[46] Allen, Emma. 2018. Climate change and disappearing island states: pursuing remedial territory. *Brill Open Law*. 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1163/23527072-00101008

surveillance, and reconnaissance at sea. Ramachela recommended the involvement and deployment of drones by navies, coast guards, and the private sector in maritime domain awareness and security. Although few African countries, such as Nigeria and Seychelles, have embraced the use of UAV technology in advancing their maritime security interests, there is a need for other countries in the region to follow suit. However, to guard against or minimise the threat of this technology falling into the hands of armed groups in the maritime domain, there is a need for appropriate regulation and the monitoring of the proliferation of drones in Africa.

## Concluding remarks

The panel discussion underscored the complex challenges threatening oceans, maritime security, and coastal communities, particularly in Africa and its surrounding waters. Key threats identified include climate change, maritime violence, IUU fishing, smuggling, and the impacts of cybercriminal activity. The panel highlighted from different perspectives the unique challenges faced by African nations due to their heavy reliance on maritime routes for economic activities and the rising geopolitical stakes in regions like the Western Indian Ocean. Addressing these challenges requires strengthening regional cooperation through frameworks like the Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy of the AU, and aligning with international bodies such as the UN. Emerging technologies, particularly UAVs, offer the potential for improving maritime domain awareness but also pose risks that need regulatory oversight. Legal and political responses to challenges, especially the threat of climate change to small island states, remain underdeveloped, revealing gaps in international law and frameworks.

> *The ongoing threat of territory loss due to rising sea levels demands creative political and legal solutions, including digital initiatives and mass migration.*

The panel also emphasised capacity-building and collaboration as critical for Africa's effective response to multifaceted maritime threats, highlighting the need for robust intra-Africa cooperation. Despite progress, operational effectiveness and human rights remain areas of concern. Addressing maritime threats is crucial, not only for regional stability but for global economic security.

## KEY POINTS

- **Multifaceted maritime threats**. The panel identified a wide range of threats to oceans and coastal regions, including climate change, violence at sea, IUU fishing, smuggling, cybercrime, human trafficking, and maritime pollution. These threats impact both Africa and global maritime regions, posing challenges to maritime security and the sustainability of the blue economy.

- **Climate change and island nations**. The impact of climate change on oceans is significant, with rising sea levels and extreme weather events threatening small island nations. These challenges raise concerns about territoriality, statehood, and migration, emphasising the limitations of current international law in addressing climate-related loss of territory and identity.

- **Maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean**. The region faces numerous security threats, including piracy, drug smuggling, IUU fishing, human trafficking, and cybercrime. The data show a rising trend in maritime incidents, underscoring the strategic importance of maritime security for regional and global economies, especially given the Western Indian Ocean's role in global trade routes.

- **Role of African institutions and international cooperation**. African institutions, guided by the AU and various regional frameworks, play a key role in addressing maritime security challenges. The involvement of international partners like the UN, EU, and major global powers highlights the need for regional and global collaboration. Despite progress, challenges remain in operational effectiveness, coordination, and capacity-building.

- **Strategic responses and emerging technologies**. To combat these maritime threats, the panel emphasised political, legal, institutional, and strategic measures. This includes enhancing maritime domain awareness using emerging technologies like drones, which can improve surveillance and maritime security operations. However, effective regulation is crucial to prevent misuse by non-state actors.

# PANEL 5 | The African Ocean(s) Domain

## Issues and Regional Perspectives (Part Two)

*Chair:*          *Dr Kingsley Makhubela (RiskRecon)*

*Speakers:*      *Rear Admiral Lisa Hendricks (SA Navy), Dr Carina Bruwer (Institute for Security Studies), Dr Oscar Otele (University of Nairobi), and Prof. Jamal Machrouh (Policy Centre for the New South)*

*Rapporteur:*    *Dr Yu-Shan Wu*

## Introduction

The fifth session of the colloquium was an extension of the previous [panel](#) on African oceans, and provided in-depth perspectives on current realities and regional responses. Each speaker contributed further detail and nuance on maritime crime, in particular related to the western littoral (Atlantic Ocean) and eastern littoral (Indian Ocean) regions. The summary provided here is grouped under three sub-sections: key issues and threats to Africa's oceans; actions and responses; and with respect to outstanding issues, what is missing and what needs to happen next.

Questions that framed the presentations were:

- What are the main threats to Africa's oceans, and how do they differ in each ocean region?
- What is the nexus between the blue economy and security?
- How does Africa perceive 'Atlantic Africa' and the Western Indian Ocean?
- What is the extent of external involvement in the continent's oceans?
- How should armed conflict and non-traditional threats in these regions be addressed?
- What are the mechanisms and platforms available to respond to maritime threats? To what extent do they fulfil their mandate(s)?

Lisa Hendricks presented the South African Navy's engagement in maritime security and policy development, touching on the Atlantic-Africa process, while Carina Bruwer honed in on the detail of maritime crime. In turn, Oscar Otele focused on the importance of maritime security to national security interests, using Kenya as case study to illustrate institutional and legal challenges. Jamal Machrouh elaborated on the nexus between the blue economy and security in the context of strong geo-economic interests and a complex geo-political reality. The blue economy is 'the new frontier of sustainable development', yet how can countries (and African regions) claim to develop a blue economy without ensuring the security of the maritime zone?

## Key issues and threats to Africa's oceans

Current threats to Africa's waters are intricately linked to globalisation. While oceans continue to play a central role in the world's trading systems, and threats are by no means new phenomena (e.g., human trafficking as a modern version of slavery), rapid advancement in technology has fast-tracked the processes of interaction. As captured by Machrouh, this interaction has vastly increased the exploitation of marine resources, and with that, security challenges. He summarised marine security challenges and threats to include categories of maritime security and threats, the blue economy, and marine environmental protection.

> Hendricks gave the example of more than 200 containers lost near Cape Agulhas over a one-month period (July to August 2024), affecting both the environment and navigation. Containers washed overboard can seriously damage vessels, requiring navigation route adjustment to avoid the threat.

Carina Bruwer provided considerable detail on maritime crime[47] as a major security challenge. This includes oceans as a source of illegal activities or as a form of transport (by vessels) for illegal activities. Again, due to an increasingly interconnected world, crimes in the South Atlantic are driven by a combination of geopolitical, regional and local socio-economic factors.

Moreover, globalisation and the involvement of different players and locations are conducive to the convergence of threats, such as drug trafficking, illegal fishing, counterfeit goods, as well as links to terrorism. Therefore, any advancements in commerce and greater physical connectivity – as seen by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – can increase the potential of illegal trade, particularly if there is inadequate law enforcement, regulations and social development.

Also evident is the evolving nature of threats over time and space. This was clear in the case of the Red Sea (to which several speakers referred), where, for example, the Houthis initially used relatively low-cost equipment but have become far more coordinated and have adopted more sophisticated technology. This has also prompted concern over the role of artificial intelligence in the maritime domain.

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[47] In this context, used interchangeably with illegal or illicit trade and organised crime at sea.

Likewise, criminal networks at sea are adopting avoidance tactics that include stateless vessels.[48]

The South African Navy's joint naval exercises[49] have changed over time and reflect a changing world. These joint exercises have evolved from combatting traditional security issues (such as the use of submarines or 'search and rescue' exercises) to non-traditional security issues, which include interdicting operations, human trafficking, drugs and illegal fishing. It was further noted that, at the same time, the Russia-Ukraine war and conflict in the Middle East could, once again, change the nature of combatting threats back to gunboat diplomacy.

Carina Bruwer noted that geography and geology play an important role in the kind of maritime crimes that exist in an ocean region; for instance, how the main drug of trade in the South Atlantic is cocaine, while heroin dominates in the Indian Ocean. Her presentation focused on the South Atlantic, and specifically on three SADC countries – Angola, Namibia and South Africa – and how geography has an impact on marine crime, as illustrated in two case studies: fisheries and drug trafficking. Notably, these three Atlantic-facing countries are located along the Cape Sea route, are home to large exclusive economic zones (EEZ) and important regional ports and, moreover, lie along the marine rich Benguela current. These countries also have large maritime domains, which means wider ocean territories to protect. Finally, the kind of criminal networks involved are due to a combination of historic al relations, such as between lusophone or transatlantic countries, as well as expanding relations with external partners, such as Asia.

Oscar Otele sketched the geographic context of the Indian Ocean region, specifically Kenya, where he outlined the persistent domination of and competition amongst external players, relating to both traditional and emerging powers. Kenya has witnessed other vulnerabilities, such as maritime terrorism (e.g., Al Shabaab and Al Qaeda), piracy, maritime territorial disputes (with Somalia), and the case of the South Atlantic African countries and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU)

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[48]Stateless vessels, or vessels without nationality, operate outside of domestic and international regulatory systems. This can lead to stateless vessels being involved in illegal activity, such as IUU fishing, without being held accountable.

[49]Such as Exercise OXIDE (with the French Navy) and IBSAMAR (between the navies of India, Brazil and South Africa).

fishing. Otele also raised the concern of agency in the maritime context, which leads to the section below.

## Actions and responses

There appears to be wide recognition of maritime threats and issues, reflected in particular outlooks and strategies across the African continent. Hendricks gave the example of the SADC Standing Maritime Committee's approval of an integrated strategy that conceptualises the Atlantic, Southern and Indian oceans as one coherent body, and expands the definition of maritime security (beyond anti-piracy).[50] Likewise, Kenya's 2017 Defence White Paper[51] confirms the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean region.

With respect to particular responses, the following are some of the salient issues foregrounded in the presentations and discussion:

- Kenya is patrolling maritime zones through CCTV cameras and perimeter monitoring systems. There are also instances of external donor support through small scale projects like mangrove planting (EU, UAE and Canada), capacity building (Indonesia, India, Netherlands and Sweden), as well as infrastructure support and construction, as seen in the infrastructural development projects linked to ports (Japan and China).
- Navies are important actors in maritime security: they not only engage in drug interdictions, antipiracy, policing and protection of the environment and resources, but also perform a diplomatic function and collaborate with like-minded countries. The South African Navy, for example, sees benefit in bilateral and multilateral joint exercises, as knowledge and skills can be gained from world-class navies, and collaboration can be leveraged for the benefit (and security) of the SADC region.

Several regional platforms were discussed:

- The African South Atlantic countries (Angola, Namibia and South Africa) are represented by the Benguela Current Convention, and even though this

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[50] See Wingrin, D. 2024. South African Navy calls for regional maritime security cooperation, Defence Web, 11 September.

[51] Kenya, Republic of. 2017. Defence White Paper, Ministry of Defence.

structure is in the main focused on science and conservation, it could be harnessed for Africa's oceans.

- As mentioned earlier, there is the SADC Standing Maritime Committee, whose objective is maritime security cooperation.
- The South African Navy recently also hosted the fifth Sea Power for Africa Symposium[52] (October 2024), themed *Good Order at Sea in the African Maritime Domain*. This symposium was attended by 35 countries and is the only pan-African forum that brings together African naval leaders and other stakeholders, including academics and policymakers.
- The presentation by Jamal Machrouh centred around the Atlantic African States Process (AASP), and provided an example of a regional response to African maritime concerns.

> Formed in 2022 by Morocco, the Atlantic-Africa Process (as captured by Machrouh) seeks to bring a stable and prosperous maritime orientated Atlantic Africa region. In the spirit of 'active solidarity', the process has also extended to landlocked Sahel countries (Burkinao Farso, Mali, Niger and Chad) in order to facilitate their access to the Atlantic. This process is essentially a strategic 'conviction of the growing importance of the sea' and at the same time, the recognition of Atlantic Africa's incomplete maritime sovereignty and previous neglect of the sea, which has resulted in loss of economic growth rights. In fact, Africa is the only region in the Atlantic with no structured economic integration (there is the EU and NAFTA in the north, and MERCUSOR in the south) and thus, this process proposes economic and political integration via maritime attributes. At the same time, this process requires clear objectives and a restructuring project: an instance of such a project is the on-going Nigeria-Morrocco gas pipeline, which would extend across the West African Atlantic coastline to Europe, making it the longest gas pipeline in the world. Of course, there are steps that need to be taken to further implement this process, as discussed in subsequent sections.

## What is missing and where to next?

While current threats and issues faced in the African maritime domain are well understood, and responses do exist, there are also factors that impact on the effectiveness of existing responses.

With respect to governance, for example, it was pointed that maritime threats cannot be adequately dealt with, without the political will and necessary resources

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[52]This features in Panel 6. For more information, visit the official website: https://seapowerforafrica.com

or maritime assets; to illustrate, South Africa spends one per cent of its GDP on defence. Linked to the issue of resources, the discussion focused on the capacitation of navies, specifically where external assistance is received (such as India's gifting of two interceptors to Mozambique in October 2024).[53] Participants agreed that while capacitation is good for the region, local African defence industries need to be prioritised; and further, that donations are  often impractical if navies cannot maintain the vessels or afford the cost of their operation.

Several speakers raised the issue of maritime domain awareness (MDA), which for Oscar Otele includes addressing sea blindness, the effective use of maritime resources, and the design of coherent maritime strategies. Participants highlighted the problematic of not knowing 'that which we do not know,' such as the extent of certain threats due to a lack of MDA or data (this is particularly true in the case for human trafficking and illegal waste). Moreover, there are assumptions made about state jurisdiction, for example, that states a.) know what vessels are up to in their waters, b.) know what their vessels are doing in the high seas, and c.) have the ability and interest in exercising their jurisdiction.

> *This highlights the paradox of the ocean – or what Carina Bruwer called 'friction use of the oceans' – where there is interest in controlling and maintaining sovereignty in the waters but also interest in the freedom of the high seas.*

Responses to maritime threats are fragmented across national, regional and international levels. For instance, no single entity covers maritime security across Africa's Atlantic coast. This is also the case at national level, where Dr Otele reflected how Kenya's response to maritime threats exists in 'scattered pieces of legislation' across sectors. Thus, a maritime security committee is required to pull together relevant departments.

Several speakers raised the importance of the AU in alleviating fragmented responses, with suggestions including moving maritime security up the continental agenda, and establishing a maritime sub-committee within the AU to drive the 2050

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[53] For more information see:  *Freight News*. 2024. India gifts two interceptors to Mozambique, 12 November.

AIM Strategy;[54] also, sub-regional efforts should link to multilateral programmes (such as the AIM strategy of the AU and AfCFTA).

Panellists agreed that until the root causes of maritime threats (which are often land-based) are addressed, security responses will only be addressing the symptoms and manifestations.

Finally, the role of maritime multilateralism[55] as a response to maritime threats, such as violent extremism, was also raised in discussion. However, there were more questions than solutions. For instance, participants asked how multilateralism could best be leveraged, given the multiplicity of and overlap in state memberships, which often create problems for coordination. This was noted in the case of the Atlantic, where there are three big initiatives (led by the US, Brazil and Morrocco) that all differ in scope and objectives. The merits and challenges of multilateralism was also explored from the perspective of the South African Navy,[56] where IBSAMAR (as a derivate of IBSA) has worked relatively well with respect to capacity building, while under BRICS, joint naval exercises such as MOSI (China, Russia and South Africa) reflect, in essence, the merits of bilateral rather than multilateral collaborations.

## Concluding remarks

It is clear from this panel on Africa's maritime domain that threats in the ocean regions, namely the South Atlantic and Indian Ocean, are compounded by globalisation and technological advancements. In addition, while there are responses at national, regional and multilateral levels, more can be done.

The discussions highlighted several areas to strengthen responses to African maritime threats, which included: the need for political will and adequate resources, greater MDA, more coordination amongst and linkages between platforms, addressing root causes of existing threats, as well as further elaborating on the role of maritime multilateralism.

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[54] 2050 AIM Strategy, https://au.int/en/documents/20130225/2050-aim-strategy.

[55] Participants defined this as multilateral platforms such as CITES and the Organized Crime Convention but some also recognised the role of regional organisations such as IORA and ASEAN.

[56] It was noted that partnerships such as IBSAMAR witness long-standing cooperation and a history of progress, in contrasts with the BRICS joint naval exercises that at times appear disjointed and reflect differences in focus.

Indeed, several speakers alluded to the African proverb mentioned by Prof. Machrouh:

> *If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*

## KEY POINTS

- **Evolving nature of maritime threats**. Maritime security challenges are shifting due to globalisation, technological advancements, and geopolitical changes. This includes increasing crimes like human trafficking, drug smuggling, illegal fishing, and the rising use of advanced technologies such as AI in maritime domains.

- **Region-specific security challenges.** Different regions face unique maritime threats. In the South Atlantic, the dominant illicit trade is cocaine, while the Indian Ocean deals with issues like heroin smuggling, maritime terrorism, and territorial disputes. Geography, history, and external influences shape the nature of these threats.

- **Diverse and fragmented responses.** Efforts to counter maritime threats include regional platforms and specific country responses like Kenya's maritime patrolling and the South African Navy's collaboration in joint exercises. However, responses are often fragmented, lacking cohesive coordination across national and regional levels, indicating a need for better-integrated approaches.

- **MDA challenges.** A significant issue is the lack of comprehensive MDA – understanding of maritime activities is limited, which affects the ability to manage and respond to threats. There is a need to improve data collection and enhance jurisdictional oversight in maritime spaces.[57]

- **Need for political will and multilateral coordination.** Effective maritime security requires strong political commitment, sufficient resources, and coordinated multilateral efforts. Addressing maritime threats goes beyond security measures to include tackling root causes like land-based socio-economic factors. Multilateralism presents challenges due to overlapping initiatives, but it remains essential for addressing broader regional threats.

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[57] This is addressed in detail in Panel 6 below.

# PANEL 6 | The Cape Sea Route

*Chair:*         *Rear Admiral (ret.) Derek Christian (SA Navy)*

*Speakers:*    *Tim Walker (Institute for Security Studies), Dr Samuel Oyewole (University of Pretoria), Dr Marjolaine Krug (Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment)*

*Rapporteur:*  *Dr Robbie Blake*

## Introduction

As one of the world's significant maritime trade routes, the sixth and final colloquium session explored the relevance of the Cape Sea Route (CSR). The session, which builds on the previous session, was framed by the following questions:

- Are Africa, its littoral and island states, and its regional organisations (AU, RECs, other groupings) prepared to manage and benefit from the growing importance of the CSR for global shipping?
- How can efficiency and intra-continental cooperation be advanced?
- What are the challenges for South Africa?

It was also the final panel discussion with many of the ideas raised during the colloquium resurfacing. Three thematic areas emerged during the presentations, and in discussions:

- Reimagining the contemporary essence of the CSR
- Reconceptualising the strategic significance of the CSR as an African maritime asset
- South Africa is a crucial piece in the CSR puzzle.

## Reimagining the contemporary essence of the CSR

While the CSR has – and continues to be – an important global sea line of communication, it is firmly rooted in the minds of most as the Cape of Storms (*Cabo das Tormentas*), the Cape of Good Hope (*Cabo da Boa Esperança*), or simply as the Cape Sea Route, all of which are Eurocentric. From a naval perspective, the CSR has also featured during times of conflict such as World War II and even today because of the conflict threat in the Red Sea.

> There are, indeed, European mythological narratives associated with the CSR. See, for example, the poem *Os Lusíadas* by Luís Vaz de Camões, which celebrates the voyages of discovery by Vasco da Gama. The poem refers to Adamastor, a personification of the Cape of Good Hope and representing the dangers of the sea and the forces of nature. Adamastor appears in Canto 5 of the poem, where he meets Vasco da Gama during a Portuguese voyage of exploration in 1497.

The main points highlighted in the presentations and discussions focused on expanding the CSR from a Eurocentric to an African paradigm, identifying opportunities and challenges associated with Africa's maritime domain in general and the CSR in particular as well as the role of the AU.

The CSR is much more than a purely Eurocentric conception.  To shift to an African paradigm, the figure below illustrates that the CSR is not at the 'bottom' of the African continent, it is located at the top of the continent and it is at the centre.
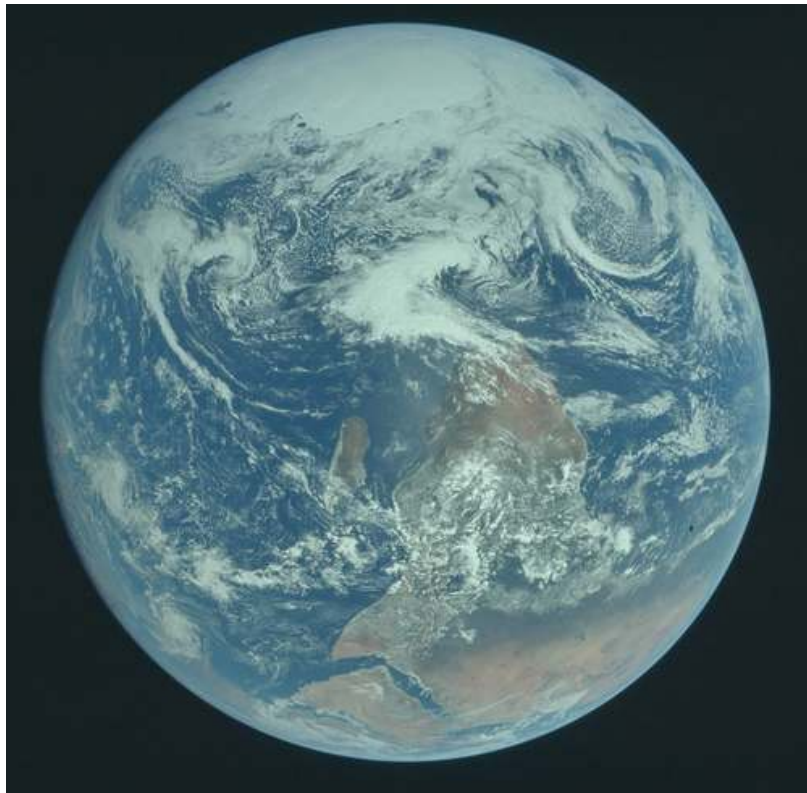


*Figure 5. The CSR, a view from the top*[58]

Together with its wicked weather conditions and other emerging crises such as pollution, its geopolitical relevance as a tri-oceans[59] sea route (see Figure 6), the likelihood of more maritime traffic – including cruise ships for tourism – together with the increased risk of maritime accidents, containers washed overboard, and its

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[58] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Blue_Marble#/media/File:Apollo_17_Blue_Marble_original_orientation_ (AS17-148-22727).jpg

[59]  The CSR links three oceans: the Atlantic Ocean, the Indian Ocean and the Southern Ocean.

proximity to Antarctica, the contemporary essence of the CSR requires reflection. The route, according to Tim Walker, is best exemplified as a 'wicked problem'.[60]
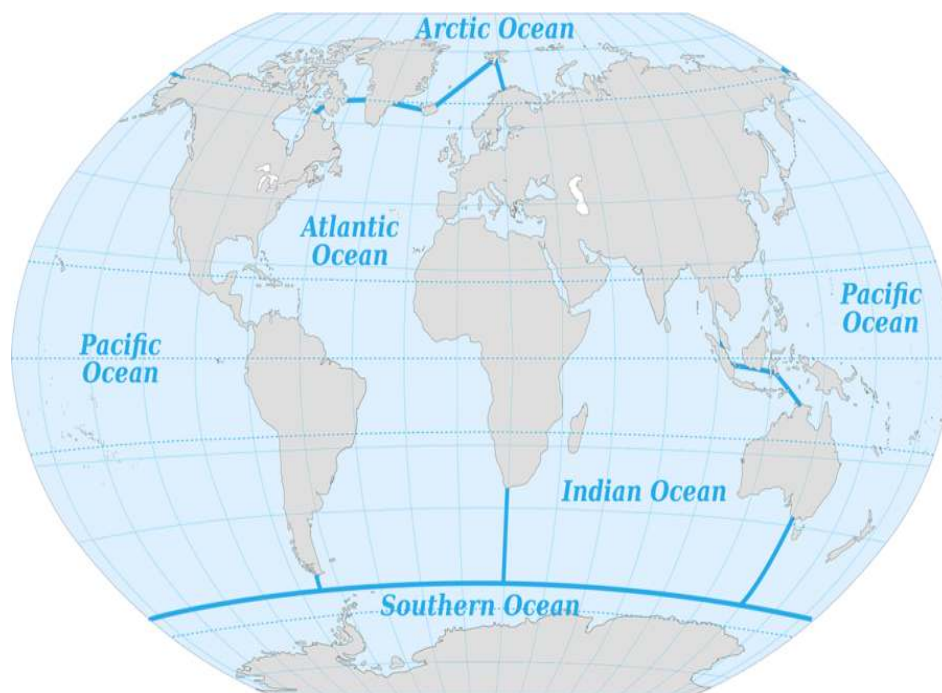


*Figure 6. The three oceans linking the CSR: The Atlantic, Southern and Indian Oceans[61]*

As a wicked problem, the contemporary essence of the CSR requires reimagination as a fully-fledged sea route that, amongst others, warrants responses to shipwrecks, salvage, and oil spills[62] involving multiple stakeholders. This dictates a comprehensive response with authentic policy attention at national, regional and continental levels. Moreover, lively and growing public interest in the protection of marine resources adds to the pressure on the authorities to address transgressions. The opportunities and challenges are legion. Opportunities presented by the CSR include the use of primary and secondary shipping routes that offer prospects to trade within and beyond Africa, investment in Africa's shipping industry, improving Africa's maritime infrastructure, providing domestic supporting services,

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[60] Wicked problems can be defined as 'problems with many interdependent factors making them seem impossible to solve. Because the factors are often incomplete, in flux, and difficult to define, solving wicked problems requires a deep understanding of the stakeholders, and an innovative approach provided by design thinking.' See here.

[61] See https://geology.com/world/ocean-map.shtml

[62] This is further complicated when determining liability for shipping accidents and environmental clean ups for ships under flags of convenience.

developing African opportunities for employment in the maritime industry and to alleviate poverty on the continent.

From an African perspective, the challenges facing the essence of the CSR include weak institutional capacity of states regarding law enforcement and maritime domain awareness, human insecurity leading to piracy as in the case of Somalia and the Gulf of Guinea, limited domestication of International Law, untrammelled exploitation of marine resources, inadequate African exploration of offshore resources, maritime crime that includes terrorism, trafficking, and dumping, climate change and disasters at sea, as well as limited intra-African trade and cooperation. The aforesaid relates to inadequate oceans governance.

Kathleen Ayensu highlighted that there are sufficient instruments at the African Union for oceans governance but they must be revisited to establish why they have not been implemented or ratified. She speculates that there is simply a lack of political will. Turning to the reform of the AU Commission under President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, it was decided to reduce the commissioners to five. In this respect, the Commissioner for Economic Development, Tourism, Trade, Industry and Mining and the Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment have overlapping remits when viewed from a maritime perspective. With the advent of the African Continental Free Trade Area, the revised African Maritime Security Charter becomes more important. Ayensu maintains that a separate Commissioner for the Oceans is needed. Moreover, financing the maritime security apparatus is not given sufficient attention by national governments and necessitates collaboration with the private sector.[63]

In summary, rethinking the crux of the contemporary CSR involves the following:

- *Reimagining the CSR*

Traditionally Eurocentric, the CSR is being reconsidered from an African perspective. Instead of being at the 'bottom' of Africa, the CSR is central and strategically positioned, particularly as a tri-ocean route. The route has a long history

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[63] On 17 January 2022, Tullow Ghana, a subsidiary of the oil and gas company Tullow Oil, and the Ghana Navy entered into an agreement, which is expected to add an additional layer of safety and security in the Ghanian waters, allowing the company to continue operations in its offshore fields in the area.

of geopolitical significance, with its relevance highlighted during global conflicts like World War II and in the present due to tensions in the Red Sea.

- *Addressing the challenges and opportunities*

The CSR faces numerous challenges as 'wicked problems' with complex and interrelated issues, including pollution, harsh weather, increased maritime traffic, accidents, and the management of shipwrecks and oil spills. Opportunities involve expanding shipping routes, bolstering Africa's maritime infrastructure, promoting intra-African trade, creating jobs, and alleviating poverty through enhanced maritime activity.

- *Improving maritime governance and security*

Weak governance, limited enforcement of international law, exploitation of resources, and maritime crime (e.g., piracy, trafficking, terrorism) are major obstacles. Climate change and inadequate intra-African cooperation also exacerbate the region's vulnerabilities. There is growing public demand for marine resource protection, increasing pressure on authorities to enforce regulations and manage maritime spaces effectively.

- *Promoting the role of the AU*

Existing AU instruments for ocean governance are underutilised, largely due to a perceived lack of political will. Recent reforms in the AU Commission, which reduced the number of commissioners, resulted in overlapping responsibilities that could hinder effective maritime management. As noted earlier, Ayensu advocates for the establishment of a dedicated Commissioner for Oceans to better coordinate maritime security and development efforts.

The revised African Maritime Security Charter and the African Continental Free Trade Area highlight the increasing importance of robust maritime governance, with a call for greater collaboration between governments and the private sector to fund security measures. Overall, there is a shift towards redefining the CSR's role for Africa's development, emphasising the need for comprehensive policy responses, better governance and leveraging the maritime domain for economic and social benefits across the continent.

### Reconceptualising the strategic significance of the CSR as an African maritime asset

As an African maritime asset, the strategic significance and reconceptualisation of the CSR have not yet received adequate attention. While the AU Peace and Security Council discusses maritime security issues more regularly than in the past, there is mostly a focus on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea and off the coast of Somalia.

> *Instead, a broader continental context is required as the AU's Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 does not explicitly mention the CSR as a strategic priority. Indeed, Tim Walker asks in light of the political and economic machinations, 'What are the continental priorities?'*

The main points highlighted in the presentations and discussions focused on the global significance of the CSR and a reconceptualisation of the CSR from an African perspective.

The global significance and importance of the CSR cannot be refuted (see Figure 7 below) and it becomes especially prominent during times of crisis in the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. By way of example, about 90 per cent of all the containerised fleets that would have used the Suez Canal were re-routed via the CSR in January 2024 because of the threat to maritime shipping in the Red Sea.[64] This implies that, from a global perspective, the CSR remains a vital and strategic means to an end.
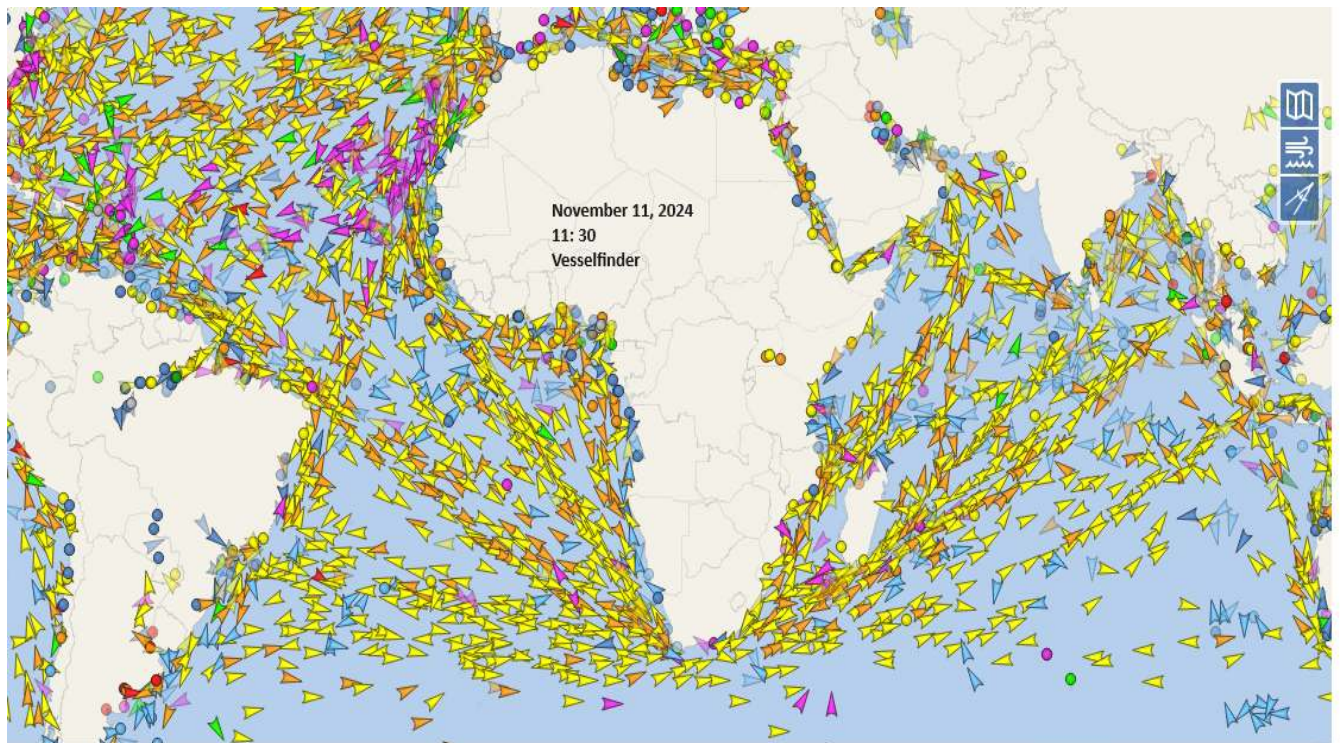
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[64] https://container-news.com/red-sea-suez-crisis-quadruples-asia-europe-med-rates/

*Figure 7. The CSR, a global perspective*[65]

> *However, Samuel Oyewole is adamant that the CSR must be reconceptualised as an African maritime asset of strategic significance and 'as a route in its own right … [with] its own merits', opportunities and challenges.*

Major ports on the African continent include Port Said and Alexandria in Egypt, Tangier and Casablanca in Morocco, Abidjan and San Pedro in Côte d'Ivoire, Tema and Takoradi in Ghana, Apapa in Nigeria, Cape Town and Durban in South Africa, Mombasa in Kenya and Djibouti. However, the parlous state of port infrastructure will require attention to allow countries to fully benefit from security and development in general and the CSR in particular. The CSR has the potential to facilitate both intra-African trade and to serve as a maritime connection with global maritime partners off the African continent.

In Figure 8 below capturing intra-African trade, the main African ports on the continent, and the nautical distances between ports, confirms the potential for continental maritime trade. As the map shows, the CSR connects the north of Africa with the south and the eastern and western African seaboard.

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[65] https://www.vesselfinder.com/

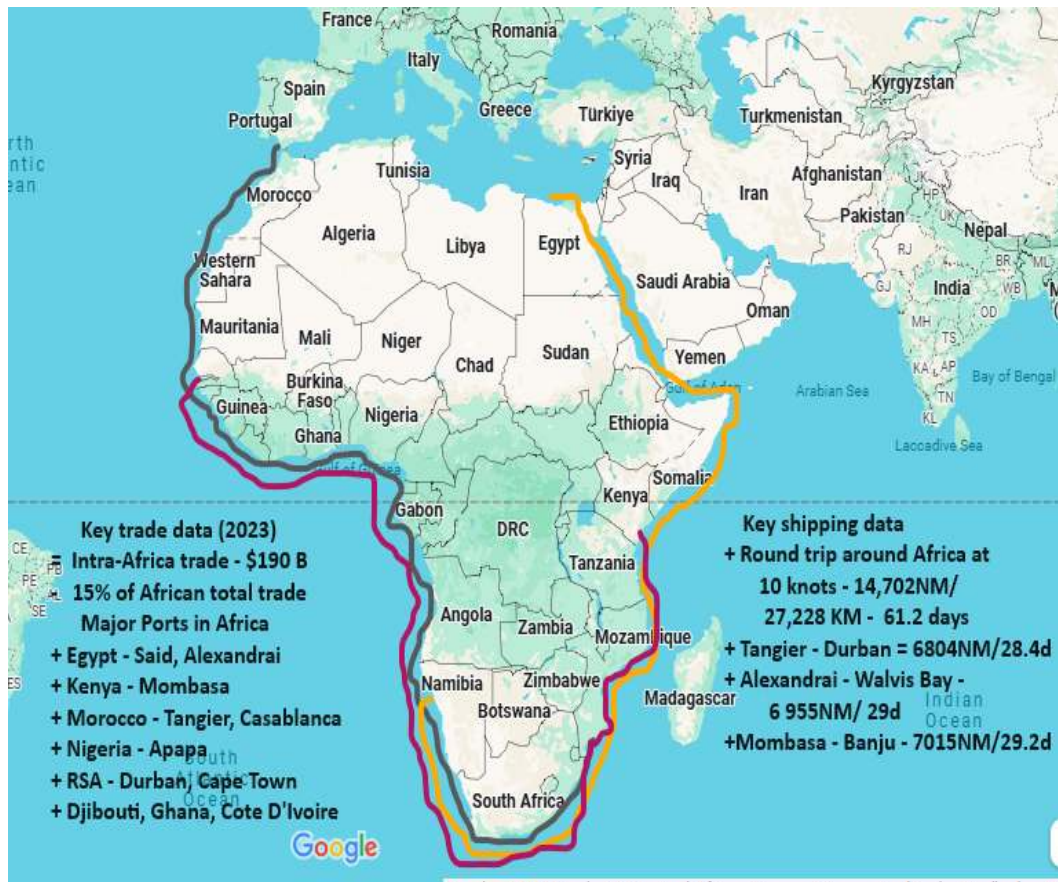*Figure 8. Intra-continental Africa maritime trade*[66]

In turn, and from a global maritime trade perspective, Figure 9 illustrates the connection between maritime countries on the continent and major trading partners such as India, the People's Republic of China, South Korea and Japan.

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[66] Presentation by Dr Samuel Oyewole on 12 November 2024 to the Oceans and Ocean Regions Governance, Third Colloquium.

*Figure 9. Inter-continental African maritime trade[67]*

In summary, a reconceptualisation of the CSR as an African maritime asset must take account of the following:

- *The substance of a reconceptualisation*

The CSR is not yet fully acknowledged as a strategic African maritime asset. Despite regular discussions by the AU Peace and Security Council, the focus tends to be on maritime security issues in the Gulf of Guinea and off the coast of Somalia. The AU's Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 does not prioritise the CSR, indicating a need for a broader continental context in understanding maritime assets and priorities.

- *Global significance of the CSR*

The CSR remains crucial during global crises, such as disruptions in the Suez Canal and the Red Sea. In January 2024, 90 per cent of containerised fleets rerouted via the Cape of Good Hope due to threats in the Red Sea, underscoring the CSR's ongoing relevance as a backup maritime route.

- *Advocacy for an African perspective*

Oyewole advocates for recognising the CSR as a route of strategic significance with unique merits, rather than merely an alternative to other global routes. Intra-African

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[67] Presentation by Dr Oyewole on 12 November 2024 to the Oceans and Ocean Regions Governance, Third Colloquium.

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maritime trade potential is significant, connecting major ports such as Cape Town, Durban, Mombasa, and Port Said. However, poor port infrastructure needs upgrading to maximise security and economic benefits from the CSR.

- *Intra-African and intercontinental connectivity*

The CSR offers a potential for boosting intra-African trade by linking the northern, southern, eastern, and western African coasts. Improved maritime infrastructure could support continental integration and connectivity. From a global perspective, the CSR provides maritime connections between African nations and key trading partners like India, China, South Korea, and Japan, indicating its strategic importance in global trade networks.

The reconceptualisation emphasises viewing the CSR not only as a strategic fallback during global crises but as a valuable and independent maritime route with opportunities for enhancing African trade, development, and global connectivity.

## South Africa is a crucial piece in the CSR puzzle:

> *South Africa is inextricably linked to the CSR. Its geographical position, an increase in maritime traffic and port visits, a need for effective maritime security and the requirement for robust maritime governance will 'feed into the perception what South Africa is as a strategic-minded country [and a maritime nation] and what it is prepared to do', according to Tim Walker.*

Key to this is the National Maritime Strategy (NMS) which will signal where the country intends to go and what maritime development requires. Added to this is the growing importance of the Southern Ocean as an extension of the CSR. Like Australia, New Zealand and Latin American countries, South Africa considers itself as one of the gateways to Antarctica and the strategic importance of the continent should be included in the NMS strategy.

The main points highlighted in the presentations and discussions focused on South Africa's leadership role and responsibilities in the maritime domain, the importance of the Border Management Authority (BMA), and maritime domain awareness.

Although there is an aspiration for South Africa, under the leadership and direction of the Department of Transport, to be an international maritime centre by 2030, targets have not been met. There is a sense that South Africa is not taking its role

seriously enough and is heading in a direction which does not allow it to capitalise on maritime economic spinoffs. Port congestion in Durban, Cape Town and Gqeberha have done the country's maritime image no favours. These ports rank amongst the lowest in the world for efficiency which was exacerbated by cyber-attacks during July 2021.[68] However, positive developments include the revival of the 2024 Sea Power for Africa Symposium which involved African navies whose aspirations were exemplified in the Declaration of Intent signed by 15 signatories after the symposium.

Moreover, South Africa has an international obligation for aeronautical search and rescue and maritime search and rescue that includes the CSR and areas beyond it which far exceed its capacity to effectively cover the allocated areas of responsibility.[69] (See Figures 10 and 11 below.)



*Figure 10. Area of responsibility for aeronautical search and rescue[70]*

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[68] Following a cyber-attack on its IT systems that brought the ports, rail and pipelines operator to a standstill in July 2021, Transnet was forced to turn to manual processes. Labelling the incident as 'an act of cyber-attack, security intrusion and sabotage,' the Transnet Port Terminals (TPT) division declared *force majeure* at South Africa's major container terminals, including those at the ports of Durban, Gqeberha, Ngqura, and Cape Town. See here.

[69] For an overview of the South African Search and Rescue (SASAR) organisation and its capabilities, see here.

[70] https://static.pmg.org.za/SASAR_ANNUAL_REPORT_20162017_SUPER_FINAL_CD_1.pdf
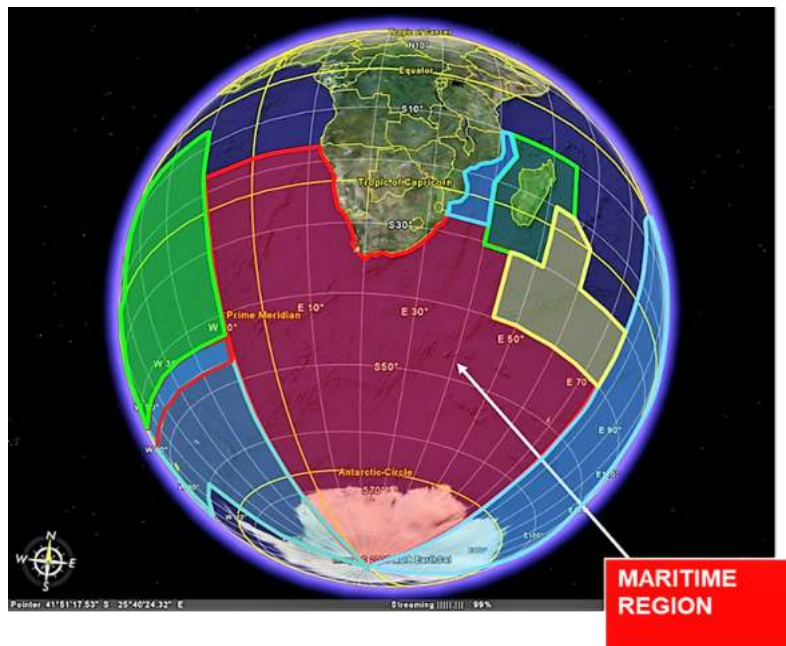
*Figure 11. Area of responsibility for maritime search and rescue[71]*

The role of the Border Management Authority (BMA) and the establishment of a coast guard as key planks in the NMS are fundamental to South Africa's leadership role in the domain of the CSR.[72]

Maritime domain awareness in South Africa is an integral component of Operation Phakisa. One project, the National Oceans and Coastal Information Management System (OCIMS), is a partnership between the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the National Research Foundation (NRF), the South African Environmental Observation Network (SAEON), and the South African Weather Service. It was initiated in 2015 and the current phase, the second, started in 2022.

Marjolaine Krug elaborated on eight decision support tools that are in different phases of development. The most mature is the Integrated Vessel Tracking (IVT) tool for security and enforcement, and another is the Operations at Sea (OpsAtSea) tool which addresses sea safety, search and rescue which is in the initial phase of development. Further expansion involves the developers and stakeholders for data provision as well as expert knowledge and expertise. Although this is a South African initiative, there are plans to extend it regionally under the Africa Marine and

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[71] https://blog.samsa.org.za/2023/02/21/south-africas-maritime-rescue-coordinating-centre-mrcc-up-for-international-excellent-serviceaward/

[72] https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/bma-seeking-boarding-reaction-boats/?referrer=newsletter. Access: 2024/12/20.

Coastal Operations for Southern Africa (MarCOSIO) mechanism funded by the European Union. The Global Monitoring for Environment and Security (GMES) and MarCOSIO project aim to maintain, further develop and provide a sustainable platform for local, institutional, human and technical capabilities across Southern African countries.

The IVT tool uses multiple data sources to track vessel movement, suspicious movement in marine protected areas and other maritime activity that is reported daily. Also of note is an automatic alert application and a historical statistical analysis. The tool has been instrumental in bringing criminals to book for drug trafficking, illegal fishing, transport of dangerous chemicals, oil spillages, and detection of bilge pumping as examples. In addition, it can identify dark targets which operate on the fringes of the EEZ as well as in marine protected areas and are involved in illegal fishing.

The OpsAtSea tool is in its infancy and most of the data are not yet available but access is envisaged later in 2024. There are two parts: one that is open access and provides weather information, and the other that is restricted and maps the search and rescue areas that have been developed for the National Sea Research Institute. Specific features of the first part include historical weather patterns and forecasts, detection and prediction of strong waves, currents and winds, pollution pathway modelling and the prediction of drifting objects such as containers and people who have fallen overboard. The second part provides immediately accessible data with a low error probability for search and rescue missions. While the project is focused on the ocean surface, for sub-surface monitoring there is a three-dimensional model available.  Sub-surface data has yet to be incorporated into the tool.

In summary, South Africa, as a crucial piece in the CSR jigsaw puzzle, must take account of the following:

- *Strategic importance of South Africa in the CSR*

South Africa's geographical location and maritime significance position it as a crucial player in the CSR. The development of a NMS is key to enhancing South Africa's role as a maritime nation, including its influence over the Southern Ocean and Antarctica.

- *Challenges to maritime leadership*

South Africa aspires to become an international maritime centre by 2030 but has fallen short of targets, with issues like port congestion and cyber-attacks impacting its maritime reputation. The revival of the Sea Power for Africa Symposium, with 15 African naval signatories, signals a positive step forward.

- *Search and rescue responsibilities:*

South Africa is responsible for aeronautical and maritime search and rescue, covering extensive areas within and beyond the CSR, posing capacity challenges.

- *BMA and Coast Guard*

The BMA is crucial to maritime governance, with a new coast guard deployed at key ports to handle border security, human trafficking, and illegal vessel movements. Equipment upgrades, funded by CARA, include drones, body cameras, and speed boats enhance maritime security operations.

- *Operation Phakisa and MDA*

Operation Phakisa aims to improve MDA through data and technology, with initiatives such as OCIMS. The IVT tool aids security and enforcement by monitoring maritime activity, while the OpsAtSea tool focuses on sea safety and search and rescue.

- *Technological developments and regional cooperation*

South Africa's maritime tools are evolving, with some being extended regionally through the MarCOSIO mechanism, funded by the EU. The IVT tool is particularly effective in combating illegal activities at sea, while the OpsAtSea tool, still in development, will provide critical search and rescue data.

The overall focus is on enhancing South Africa's maritime role and capabilities, addressing existing challenges, and expanding technological and regional collaboration for improved maritime governance.

## Concluding remarks

As one of the world's significant maritime trade routes, this session explored the relevance of the CSR by striving to answer the following questions:

- Are Africa, its littoral and island states, and its regional organisations (AU, RECs, other groupings) prepared to manage and benefit from the growing importance of the CSR for global shipping?
- How can efficiency and intra-continental cooperation be advanced?
- What are the challenges for South Africa?

In response to the questions, the session reached three interrelated conclusions. Firstly, the contemporary substance of the CSR must be reconsidered from an African perspective to position Africa, its littoral and island states, and its regional organisations (AU, RECs, other groupings) to manage and benefit from the growing importance of the CSR for global and continental shipping.  Secondly, the strategic significance of the CSR must be reconceptualised as an African maritime asset to improve efficiency and intra-continental cooperation. Finally, South Africa is a key piece in the CSR jigsaw puzzle and will be required to assume a prominent maritime leadership role in this regard.

## KEY POINTS

The key points collectively underline the session's focus on redefining the CSR's role within Africa, addressing governance challenges, and enhancing South Africa's leadership as the continent's primary maritime nation:

- **Reconceptualising the CSR from an African perspective.** The session emphasised the need to move away from the traditional Eurocentric view of the CSR as merely a route at the 'bottom' of Africa. Instead, it is increasingly seen as a central and strategic maritime asset for the continent. This shift involves acknowledging its geopolitical and economic potential, especially in light of increased maritime traffic, climate risks, and potential for intra-African trade.

- **Challenges and opportunities in managing the CSR.** The CSR is seen as a 'wicked problem' with interconnected challenges like pollution, piracy, harsh weather conditions, and accidents. Yet, it presents opportunities for Africa, such as enhanced

maritime infrastructure, intra-African trade, and job creation. Efficient management requires strengthening maritime governance and addressing institutional weaknesses across the continent.

- **The role of the AU in oceans governance.** The session highlighted the existing but underutilised frameworks within the AU for oceans governance. The need for clearer maritime priorities and potentially creating a dedicated Commissioner for Oceans was discussed. The African Maritime Security Charter and the African Continental Free Trade Area could play key roles in better managing the CSR, ensuring Africa's control over the narrative and leveraging the route's benefits.

- **South Africa's strategic importance in the CSR.** South Africa, due to its geographical location, is seen as a crucial player in the CSR. Its development of a National Maritime Strategy (NMS) and the establishment of the Border Management Authority (BMA) are vital steps toward improving its maritime governance. Enhancements in search and rescue capabilities, maritime domain awareness, and technological advancements are needed for South Africa to fulfil its leadership role in managing the CSR effectively.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The final section of this report synthesises the inputs provided by the presenters and participants to inform recommendations for future collaboration related to the theme of the third colloquium, *Oceans and Ocean Regions Governance*. Here it should be noted that the 2024 colloquium builds on and further advances the recommendations in the 2022 and 2023 reports which can be summarised as follows:

- The 2022 report proposed theoretical and applied research agendas. The theoretical research agenda focused on pursuing research on the evolution of the oceans regions, climate change and its impact on evolving oceans regions, and oceans governance. The applied research agenda explored the role and functions of Africa's regional organisations – that is, the AU and regional economic communities – in promoting the blue economy and maritime security.

- The 2023 report proposed a collaborative research agenda that is selectively multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary to collectively establish an understanding of the theories, concepts and practices associated with ocean regions in an era of global transformation. The agenda focused on: the nature and characteristics as well as the values and ideas of the evolving 'new' world order, the place of seascapes in this order, the relationship between human security and maritime security, the impact and implications of an expanded BRICS, the challenges associated with Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, and African capacity building in the maritime domain and maritime governance.

- The third colloquium underscored the geopolitical, legal, and ecological dimensions of ocean governance, emphasising sustainable development and the agency of diverse stakeholders. Africa's 'blue agency' was a central theme, exploring the continent's potential in shaping ocean governance and maritime security, alongside its struggles with limited implementation, climate vulnerabilities, and external dependencies.

The colloquium also examined the theoretical shift from terracentrism to a terraqueous paradigm in International Relations, proposing ocean regions as dynamic spaces shaped by transnational and ecological factors. The panels on

BRICS, G20 and SIDS discussed the complexities of multilateral governance, climate resilience, and maritime crime related to SIDS. Ultimately, the colloquium called for innovative, inclusive governance frameworks addressing both material realities and societal imperatives.

The presentations, panel discussions and question-and-answer sessions are distilled into three parts: cross-cutting thematic areas, a theoretical research agenda on Africa's maritime role, and an applied research agenda on Africa's maritime role.

## Cross-cutting thematic areas

Five themes capture the third colloquium's conceptual reach in presentations and discussion:

- *Geopolitical dynamics in ocean regions*. Exploring the intersection of geopolitics, security, and cooperation in contested maritime zones such as the Eastern Mediterranean and Indo-Pacific.
- *Legal frameworks and maritime governance.* Examining the evolution and challenges of international legal instruments like UNCLOS and the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) treaty.
- *Climate change and marine ecosystem*. Investigating the impacts of climate change on oceanic ecosystems and the adaptive governance measures needed to mitigate these effects.
- *Small island states and maritime resilience*. Analysing the unique challenges faced by small island nations, including climate vulnerability, economic constraints, and maritime crime.
- *Africa's blue economy and maritime security*. Focusing on Africa's role in ocean governance, the potential of the blue economy, and the implementation of frameworks like CEMZA.

The five thematic areas are narrowed to identify recommendations for a theoretical and an applied research agenda that focuses on Africa's maritime role.

## A theoretical research agenda

A theoretical research agenda on Africa's maritime role includes specific paradigms, maritime identity, sovereignty at sea, transnationalism and ecological approaches:

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- *Terracentrism vs terraqueous paradigms in Africa*. Examining shifts in International Relations theory emphasising ocean-centric governance models in Africa's maritime regions.
- *Africa's maritime identity in global governance*. Exploring the narratives and historical legacies shaping Africa's maritime identity and its implications for contemporary ocean governance.
- *Africa's sovereignty at sea*. Investigating and reconceptualising how African nations can integrate supranational governance models while preserving sovereignty, focusing on collective management frameworks like CEMZA.
- *Transnationalism in African maritime regions*. Studying the interconnectedness of human migration, diaspora networks, and regional alliances shaping Africa's oceans governance.
- *Ecological African maritime approaches*. Analysing how ecological stewardship and traditional knowledge systems can redefine African approaches to marine resource management.

An applied research agenda on Africa's maritime role gives further substance to the theoretical research agenda by instrumentalising the Lomé Charter, enhancing maritime surveillance, sustainably exploiting EEZs, focusing on capacity building for maritime security forces and fostering climate resilience:

- *Implementation of the African Union's Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development (Lomé Charter)*. Assessing the barriers to the ratification and implementation of the Lomé Charter and propose actionable policy recommendations.
- *Maritime surveillance in African waters*. Developing technology-driven solutions to enhance and strengthen monitoring and enforcement against IUU fishing and maritime crime.
- *Sustainable exploitation of Africa's EEZs*. Creating frameworks for balancing economic development and environmental conservation in Africa's EEZs.
- *Capacity building for African maritime security forces*. Designing training and resource-sharing programmes to bolster Africa's maritime security infrastructure.

- *Climate resilience in African maritime communities.* Implementing community-based initiatives to address the impact of climate change on coastal and island populations.

The recommendations highlight the pressing need for innovative and inclusive frameworks for oceans governance. Africa, with its vast maritime territories, resources and strategic location, is both a participant and a leader in global maritime discourses. The identified theoretical and applied research areas demonstrate the potential for Africa to enhance its maritime agency by addressing issues of sovereignty, transnationalism, ecological stewardship, and climate resilience.

Practical efforts like capacity building and charter implementation can align with broader theoretical paradigms to ensure sustainable and equitable ocean governance. The cross-disciplinary and multilateral collaboration emphasised in the report underpins the hope for a future where oceanic and human systems coexist harmoniously, with Africa at the forefront of shaping this maritime legacy and ocean governance architectures.
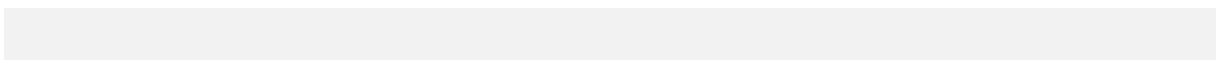
# Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| O20 | Oceans 20 |
| AASP | Atlantic African States Process (also referred to as Platform of African Atlantic States (PAAS)) |
| AfCFTA | African Continental Free Trade Area |
| AIMS | Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy |
| AOSIS | Alliance of Small Island States |
| APIOI | Association of Indian Ocean Ports |
| APSA | African Peace and Security Architecture |
| AU | African Union |
| AUCIL | African Union Commission on International Law |
| BBNJ | Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction |
| BMA | Border Management Authority |
| BRI | Belt-and-Road Initiative |
| BRICS | Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa |
| BRICS(+) | (+) Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates |
| CEMZA | Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone of Africa |
| CGIMA | Contact Group on Illicit Maritime Activities (in the Western Indian Ocean) |
| CHM | Common Heritage of Mankind |
| CRESMAC | Central African Regional Maritime Safety Centre |
| CRESMAO | West African Regional Maritime Security Centre |
| CSR | Cape Sea Route |
| DCoC | Djibouti Code of Conduct |
| DIRCO | Department of International Relations and Cooperation |
| EAC | East African Community |
| ECCAS | Economic Community of Central African States |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| ECSWG | Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group |
| EEZs | Exclusive Economic Zones |
| EM | Eastern Mediterranean |
| EU | European Union |
| G7 | Group of 7 |
| G20 | Group of 20 |
| GMES | Global Monitoring for Environment and Security |
| GERD | Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam |
| GGC | Gulf of Guinea Commission |
| GIUK | The Greenland, Iceland and the United Kingdom gap |
| GMES | Global Monitoring for Environment and Security |

| | |
|---|---|
| IBSA | India, Brazil and South Africa |
| IBSAMAR | India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime |
| ICJ | International Court of Justice |
| IGAD | Intergovernmental Authority on Development |
| INTERPOL | International Criminal Police Organisation |
| IOC | Indian Ocean Commission |
| IOM | International Maritime Organisation |
| IONS | Indian Ocean Naval Symposium |
| IOR | Indian Ocean Region |
| IOR | Indian Ocean Rim |
| IORA | Indian Ocean Rim Association |
| IRT | International Relations Theory |
| ISA | International Seabed Authority |
| ISS | Institute for Security Studies |
| ITLOS | Tribunal of the Law of the Sea |
| IUU | Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (fishing) |
| LIO | Liberal International Order |
| LOS | Large Ocean States |
| LSE IDEAS | London School of Economics foreign policy think tank |
| MarCOSIO | Africa Marine and Coastal Operations for Southern Africa |
| MASE | Maritime Security Programme |
| MDA | Maritime Domain Awareness |
| MERCUSOR | South American trade bloc |
| MOC | Maritime Operations Centre |
| MOSI | MOSI (China, Russia and South Africa) |
| MRCC | Multinational Regional Coordination Centre |
| NAFTA | North American Free Trade Agreement |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organisation |
| NGOs | Non-governmental Organisations |
| NMS | National Maritime Strategy |
| NRF | National Research Foundation |
| NSA | Non-state Actors |
| OCIMS | Operations at Sea Decision Support Tool |
| OpsAtSea | Operations at Sea |
| OXIDE | A joint maritime exercise between the French and SA navies |
| PAAS | Platform of African Atlantic States (also referred to as the Atlantic African States Process (AASP)) |
| PAC | Partnership for Atlantic Cooperation |
| PIF | Pacific Island Forum |

| | |
|---|---|
| PMAESA | Port Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa |
| PSC | Peace and Security Council |
| Quads | Quadrilateral Security Dialogues between the US, Japan, India and Australia |
| RCOC | Regional Coordination of Operations Centre |
| RECs | Regional Economic Communities |
| RMIFC | Regional Maritime Information Fusion Centre |
| RSC | Regional Security Complexes |
| SADC | Southern African Development Community |
| SAEON | South African Environmental Observation Network |
| SDGs | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SIDS | Small Island Development States |
| SMC SADC | Standing Maritime Committee of SADC |
| SMF | Special Mobile Force |
| SPAs | Special Protection Areas |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UAVs | Unmanned Aerial Vehicles |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCLOS | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| UNODC | UN Office on Drugs and Crime |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UP | University of Pretoria |
| US | United States |
| WIOMSA | Western Indian Ocean Marine Science Association |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |
| ZOPACAS | Zone of Peace Cooperation in the South Atlantic |