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Africa and the Geopolitics of the Indian Ocean

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African perspectives. Global insights.

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the history of the Indian Ocean, littoral, island and extra-regional states have vied to secure their trade routes, which in turn affects Africa. By reviewing the stakeholders' dynamics in the Indian Ocean, the implications and challenges for Africa can be analysed.

The stakeholder review analyses the attributes and constituency of the Indian Ocean, develops a common position for definitions and gives a select history of the world's third-largest ocean. Countries that have historically frequented the Indian Ocean continue to do so, but the intensity of their activities has increased, as their objectives centre on the common denominator of ensuring energy security and advancing maritime trade. These issues are critical not only for their survival in a world of diminishing resources and increased globalised competition, but also for emerging countries' economies to continue to grow exponentially.

In contrast to the Indian Ocean's increased dynamics, continental Africa's position appears to be characterised by a passive approach. This inert position does not allow Africa to set the agenda for events that are changing the dynamics in its zone of influence, yet for which there are normative developmental imperatives. It is critical that Africa change its attitude and determines its own schedule for maritime development. Africa needs to manage these challenges pro-actively at various levels – continentally, regionally and bilaterally. By partnering with those powers that affect the forces in the Indian Ocean, Africa can be more in charge of its destiny.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Prior to joining the South African Institute of International Affairs as a senior researcher in the Emerging Powers and Global Challenges Programme, Frank van Rooyen was an officer in the South African Navy. His last post was senior staff officer maritime strategy, where he served on the secretariat for the Southern African Development Community's Standing Maritime Committee and the Sea Power for Africa symposiums. He participated in bilateral, trilateral and multilateral defence committees and navy staff talks, and in 2003 represented the South African National Defence Force on the Kenyan national defence course, during which period he obtained an MA (International Studies) from the University of Nairobi. He is working towards a PhD, through the University of the Free State's Centre for Africa Studies, which looks at diplomacy and politico-security co-operation among India, Brazil and South Africa (the IBSA countries).

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADAPT	Africa Deployment Assistance Partnership Team
AFRICOM	United States Africa Command
ALINDIEN	French forces joint command in the Indian Ocean
AU	African Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
EU	European Union
IISS	International Institute of Strategic Studies
IMO	International Maritime Organisation
IONS	Indian Ocean Naval Symposium
IOR	Indian Ocean Rim
IOR-ARC	Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation
ISS	International Sea Power Symposium
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
SLOC	sea lines of communication
SPAS	Sea Power for Africa Symposium
UAV	unmanned aerial vehicle
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea
US	United States

INTRODUCTION

‘Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. This ocean is the key to the seven seas in the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided in these waters.’¹

Alfred Thayer Mahan

Although increasingly important, the maritime domain is often neglected in the security discourse. Yet, as the influential naval thinker, Alfred Thayer Mahan, said:²

[The] first and most obvious light in which the sea presents itself from the political and social point of view is that of a great highway; or better, perhaps, of a wide common, over which men may pass in all directions, but on which some well-worn paths show that controlling reasons have led them to choose certain lines of travel rather than others. These lines of travel are called trade routes; and the reasons which have determined them are to be sought in the history of the world.

The ‘wide common’ has four attributes, which has made it a focus in human development and interaction for millennia. It is a resource, a means of transportation, of information and of dominion. These attributes imbue it with the concept of ‘sea power’. However, what gives it critical mass is not what happens at sea, but how what happens can influence the outcomes of events ashore.³

Globalisation is defined as the ‘worldwide movement towards economic, financial, trade and communications integration’.⁴ The concepts of sea power, globalisation and their praxis clearly overlap. Globalisation goes beyond domestic, national and regional perspectives to encompass an interconnected and inter-dependent world with liberated transfers of capital, goods and services across national frontiers.⁵

Globalisation has several defence implications. As Till notes, it encourages ‘a “borderless world” in which the autarchy of the national units of which it is composed is gradually being whittled away by the development of a variety of transnational economic and technological trends’,⁶ where the emphasis increasingly is on the system and not on its components. A second implication is that it is dynamic, as it changes constantly and rapidly. The third implication goes to the heart of this paper: ‘Globalisation depends absolutely on the free flow of sea-based shipping. For that reason, it is profoundly maritime in nature, something therefore that is likely to be of particular interest to the world’s navies’.⁷ Paradoxically, one of the consequences of globalisation is the globalisation of security threats involving various forms of menace, from non-state terrorism to international crime mafias.

The Indian Ocean has historically been a critical geostrategic space of competitive maritime security that features the presence of extra-regional naval forces. Today, the ocean is an area of geo-economic and geostrategic consequence for many littoral and non-littoral states, its importance driven by the enormous energy and natural resources of the region. Globalisation promises the potential of additional regional economic development, although (unsurprisingly) rivalries are developing in the Indian Ocean as global power shifts. However, the ‘idea of ocean’ is more than a subject for area studies and geopolitics. From a South viewpoint, the Indian Ocean represents a ‘theoretical terrain, a geographical

space and a historical network of human connectivities. It is by its nature ... a fluid topic, and one of ongoing interdisciplinary interest.⁸

The more sophisticated the sea-based side of globalisation, the more productive, but vulnerable, it becomes.⁹ Those that destabilise maritime security and good order at sea fragment the very foundation that the advantages of maritime trade, resource extraction, sea lines of communication (SLOC) and world economies draw from the sea.¹⁰ Countries or regions that are vulnerable to the differential benefits of globalisation, yet have little control over the defence and policing of their maritime domains, are particularly at risk. One such region is Africa with its long coastline populated by 39 states, of which at least a dozen are either East African littoral or western island states.

This study analyses increasingly striking features of the Indian Ocean Rim (IOR), namely the degree and variety of prevalent tensions that are the result of the oceanic interaction, energy and maritime trade patterns. After defining the concepts that lay the foundation for the subsequent discussions, an overview of the seven key nations that are active in the maritime affairs of the Indian Ocean, the implications for maritime rivalries, and the effects on Africa are presented. This study reviews actions taken by continental and other structures and organs and concludes with appropriate maritime policy proposals for Africa.

GEOPOLITICS AND GEOSTRATEGY DEFINED

Geopolitics and geostrategy are terms that are often confused and used interchangeably. Hence, for the purpose of this research, the terms are defined as follows. Geopolitics is 'the analysis of the interaction of two frameworks – that between geographical settings and perspectives; and political processes.'¹¹ Geostrategy is 'the branch of geopolitics that deals with strategy, i.e., geopolitical and strategic factors that together characterise a certain geographic area; or a political strategy based on geopolitics.'¹² The political processes include international forces and domestic forces that influence international behaviour. Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic and experience reciprocal influences. Accordingly, geopolitics straddles two disciplines – geography and politics – and so its approaches vary according to the analytical frameworks common to each discipline.¹³

THE INDIAN OCEAN – SELECT GEOSTRATEGY AND GEOPOLITICAL HISTORY

The foremost geostrategic characteristic of the Indian Ocean is that it is an area of communication, for not only countries within its Rim, but also the world. During the spring of 2000, the International Hydrographic Organisation decided to delimit a fifth world ocean, the Southern Ocean, which extends from the coast of Antarctica north to 60 degrees latitude,¹⁴ thereby reducing the size of the Indian Ocean, which nevertheless remains the third-largest of the world's five oceans.¹⁵ Furthermore, from a geostrategic view, the Indian Ocean contains notable energy reserves and facilitates the movement of this energy and maritime trade: it carries half of the world's container ships, one-third of the bulk cargo

traffic and two-thirds of the world's oil shipments. The ocean is a lifeline of international trade and economy, weaving together trade routes and controlling major sea lanes.

The Indian Ocean's recent history illustrates the geopolitical dynamics of the region. After the Second World War, decolonisation meant the end of British hegemony in the Indian Ocean, and the escalation of superpower rivalry due to the region's strategic importance. The common historical experience of European imperialism had left a sense of shared identity, and it seemed only logical for the IOR countries to rediscover the past littoral economic, social and cultural community, of an ocean-centric, regional, co-operative grouping serving as a bridgehead between Africa, Asia, and Australasia.

In late 1940s, the Indian Ocean was a relative backwater. Oil was less than \$2 a barrel. White regimes ruled Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia and South Africa. British units were still in the Persian Gulf (as they had been, intermittently, for 150 years). However, developments from the 1950s propelled the Indian Ocean to the forefront of international affairs: the British withdrew from Suez; another Indo-Pakistani war began; the two superpowers increased naval activity in the region; the last of the island and colonial states were granted independence; the oil crisis occurred in 1973; racial conflict escalated in South Africa; Iran had a revolution; and the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan.¹⁶

The following decades saw the destructive wars between Eritrea and Ethiopia off the Red Sea, the ramifications of the failed Somalian state and growing levels of insecurity in Yemen off the Gulf of Aden. These events were the catalysts for the prevailing pattern of instabilities, which ensures that the Indian Ocean remains an important focal point in world affairs.

On 26 December 2004, a force of great destruction displayed the unity of the Indian Ocean, when a massive tsunami off the coast of Sumatra ripped along the IOR, killing and injuring thousands, devastating communities and livelihoods. Its effects were felt in countries from Sri Lanka to Indonesia in the west to Somalia in the east, down to South Africa in the south-east of the Indian Ocean.

The IOR contains nearly two billion people, or between a quarter and a third of the world's population. It is a massive market, rich in strategic and precious minerals and metals and other natural resources, valuable marine resources – from food fisheries to raw material and energy for industries. It has abundant and diverse arable land, as well as significant human resources and technological capabilities. Many Rim countries are becoming globally competitive and developing new capacities, which could be jointly harnessed through regional co-operation efforts. However, not all these capabilities are positive developments. *Foreign Affairs* notes that the 'greater Indian Ocean region encompasses the entire arc of Islam ... [t]oday, the western reaches of the Indian Ocean include the tinderboxes of Somalia, Yemen, Iran and Pakistan – constituting a network of dynamic trade as well as network of global terrorism, piracy and drug smuggling.'¹⁷

These threats, which have been described as 'anarchy at sea',¹⁸ result from unsecured or ungoverned seas. Transnational crime syndicates, commercial opportunists, human traffickers and polluters can move around relatively inexpensively and inconspicuously. The growing incidences of organised piracy plague and endanger maritime traffic,¹⁹ while terrorism continues to thrive in the region and world-wide, despite ongoing counter-terrorism actions. A further factor is 'the continued existence of territorial disputes and ethnic conflicts in the region with long historical roots', together with 'the confrontational

posture adopted by regional states to resolve conflicting ocean interests and how naval power is used to assert rights over the disputed areas.²⁰

The transit of energy (oil, fuel products, natural gas, coal) is a complex, integrated system, influenced by geopolitical, economic and environmental factors, including energy security, political and economic relations with countries of transit, route optimisation and socio-ecological constraints. These are all subject to world dynamics, market and economic forces, which shape (to varying degrees) the patterns of changes of the transit of energy products.

INDIAN OCEAN CHOKE POINTS AND SEA LINES OF COMMUNICATION

The Indian Ocean contains a number of the world's maritime choke points, which 'implies that at such points there is the opportunity for closure, or at least restriction, of the flow of ocean-borne traffic and/or flight paths which are critical to the well-being of a particular state or group of states'.²¹ These include the Cape Sea Route, the Mozambique Channel, Bab-el-Mandab in the Gulf of Aden, the Straits of Hormuz, Straits of Malacca, Lombok and the Sunda Straits. The Indian Ocean is artificially connected to the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal and the Red Sea.

SLOC are the highways of the oceans that ensure vast maritime traffic and energy flows. With their spiralling demand for energy, developed and developing countries on the IOR are sensitive to the security of the region's SLOC and choke points. Choke points and SLOC are at the vanguard of strategic thinking of China and India, the two Asian states at the forefront of world economic resurgence. Africa has also become a staging post for these two giants, where India hopes to successfully challenge China in order to ensure continued access to Africa's energy resources. In addition, energy is of huge importance to the 'demand heartland' (India, China and Japan).²²

Although the key to their security lies in extensive co-operation, SLOC arouse different response strategies among different people. To a military analyst, SLOC are related to the maritime instruments of power, and so maritime geography becomes the pivot on which forces must be deployed. To a politician, SLOC signify the state of relations with countries located along the sea route traversed, while for an economist a SLOC is simply the shortest and most economical travel distance between two destinations. Similarly, for some nations, multilateral co-operation on SLOC security may mean a perceived intrusion into aspects of sovereignty. Thus, the security of sea lanes requires comprehensive strategies that encompass differing perceptions and national interests of concerned states.²³

HEGEMONY IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

In *The Indian Ocean in World History*²⁴, Milo Kearney argues that 'significant participation in Indian Ocean trade has always been a major indicator of a state's or region's prominence and leadership from a global perspective'. This does not mean that the Indian Ocean floated the economy of every leading state or region, but rather that a major presence

in Indian Ocean trade has always indicated a level of economic vigour essential to world leadership. Today, increasing globalisation dominates strategic considerations, specifically economic integration, which has led to enhanced maritime security concerns, since most regional trade is sea-borne. Power is tilting from West to East, and this de facto transfer of power 'is gathering pace and soon will dramatically change the context for dealing with international challenges – as well as the challenges themselves.'²⁵

History shows that major shifts between great powers and regions rarely occur and, just as tectonic plates shifting on an ocean bed cause a tsunami, so too these shifts are accompanied by waves of turbulence and high levels of tension throughout the world. Power is not readily yielded, and is accompanied by tremors, as the heavily populated states of Asia seek a greater stake in the world's economy and affairs. South-East Asian states are steadily integrating their economies through trade and investment treaties. For instance, the Japanese consider that:²⁶

[Russia] is pursuing its national interests as 'a strong nation', and it is developing its military posture in line with its resources against the backdrop of its economic development to date. Recently there has been global deployment of its military, navy and air force in particular, including joint training accompanying long-term ocean voyages, anti-piracy activities, and patrol activities by strategic bombers.

However, unlike in the past, the hub is China, not Japan or the US. The members of the Association of South-East Asian Nations are (finally) seriously considering a monetary union. The result could be a vast economic trade bloc, which would account for much of Asia's, and therefore the world's economic growth. Joining in the new, rapidly expanding hub, through their burgeoning economies, are other Asian countries like India, South Korea and Indonesia.

Today, the maritime dynamics in the Indian Ocean consist of extra-regional navies deploying their power, taking on bellicose non-state actors, to ensure the security of energy supply and trade. The emergent missions, new doctrines and technologies that extra-regional naval forces increasingly exhibit show the rising strategic importance of the region. The section below explores the objectives of key players in the Indian Ocean and how their engagement has evolved in recent times.

COUNTRIES' MARITIME SECURITY CO-OPERATION IN THE WESTERN INDIAN OCEAN

Co-operation is an important diplomatic attribute for maritime nations that operate in the Indian Ocean, a delimited ocean space that continues to experience an influx of forces. One area of collaboration is the north-western Indian Ocean, where these maritime powers are all involved in some form of anti-piracy or World Food Programme vessel protection or general maritime security operation off Yemen, Somalia, the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa. They can be regional, single-state, or independent operations. While figures change continuously, at any one time in excess of 30 warships from at least four alliances – the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation, the Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty and the European

Union (EU) – may be present in the area. In July 2010, the arrival of a Royal Netherlands Navy submarine in the area to carry out reconnaissance improved capability and significantly raised the stakes.²⁷

Co-operation is embodied by India and France, for whom the Indian Ocean has strategic significance because of its geographic, economic and security value, ‘it’s everybody’s interest to guarantee the stability in this region.’²⁸

What may militate against co-operation is the competition for resources and access to these resources. Over the past two years, a growing presence of navies, wanting to claim increasingly important sea lanes, shows that regional powers are taking a more robust approach to world affairs. Yet, although the US navy still dwarfs other navies, even this may change; for ‘if you’re looking forward over the next few decades, there is no doubt that Asian navies will have a larger presence in the Indian Ocean relative to Western forces.’²⁹

EXTRA-REGIONAL AND REGIONAL NAVIES IN THE INDIAN OCEAN – A BRIEF SURVEY

United States

The National Security Act of 1947 was when the US last undertook a major revision of its national security management structure. An unchanged legal basis has meant inflexibility, which has led to ad hoc, often extra-judicial and covert, application of this policy over the past 60 years – often justified by Cold War polemics. This approach resulted in rushed and incremental responses to emerging trends and threats.

When the Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991, the US remained the world’s only superpower, but needed a revised understanding of its national security management approach, for the ‘two decades since the end of the Cold War have been marked by both the promise and perils of change.’³⁰ Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, the US created its Department of Homeland Security, which is tasked with the cohesive management of security issues. Yet, contemporary security issues are not solely of external origin, their sources are indeed partly international and partly domestic, subject to rapid and often unpredictable changes, and so require organisational modification in order to enhance national security management.³¹ Accordingly, the US produced an updated National Security Strategy in May 2010.

Integrated fully with the national strategy are set objectives, with appropriate tactical implementation components. Instead of being reactive, ‘new missions are multi-faceted and require a broad approach: kinetic, diplomatic, nation-building, cultural anthropology, counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency.’³² The innovative strategy attempts to manage issues pro-actively and holistically, depending on known US leadership attributes, which include qualitative alliances, a professional military, a hitherto unmatched economy, a sturdy democracy and vibrant citizens. While emphatically stating that ‘[g]oing forward, there should be no doubt: the United States of America will continue to underwrite global security’,³³ the strategy acknowledges that no one nation, however powerful, can single-handedly meet global challenges. Hence, co-operation is crucial to US involvement in world affairs.

While primarily an Atlantic and a Pacific power, the US maintains a high profile in the Indian Ocean, where its military presence stretches from the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa, its island states, and from South to South-East Asia. The US's key interests in the Indian Ocean are economic and political, underpinned by the superpower's commitment to an international order based upon rights and concomitant responsibilities. At the same time shared interests and values with like-minded nations are emphasised and conflated into common goals; in this way, the US cannot be said to act only in its own self-interest.

The US is combating terrorist groups linked to al-Qaeda from the Arabian Sea to the Gulf of Aden/Horn of Africa and South-East Asian waters. The US legal and political instruments include military alliances, treaties and bilateral co-operation mechanisms with an increasing number of states, some designed to increase the functional capacity and footprint of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM). Previously, Africa fell under various US regional commands, which militated against a coherent approach to Africa. This changed when AFRICOM was established as one of the US Department of Defence's six regional military headquarters, becoming operational in October 2008. AFRICOM has 'administrative responsibility for US military support to US government policy in Africa, to include military-to-military relationships with 53 African nations.'³⁴ At present, its headquarters are in Stuttgart, Germany because African nations are loathe to host US bases on the continent, as this may be perceived as the militarisation of relations with the US. African leaders and media in Africa have objected that AFRICOM will pursue narrowly defined US interests at the expense of both the sovereignty and welfare of the African nations.³⁵

Despite this diplomatic setback, the US continues to be a dominant player, from the Red Sea to the South China Sea. The US's predominance is due to its military power and an overt and well-defined strategy in the region. During the Cold War, the US's strategy was to contain the Soviet Union and deter, and if required defeat, North Korea and China. The 'Carter Doctrine'³⁶ explicitly provided for the use of military force to protect US interests in the Persian Gulf and South-West Asia.

The tri-service strategy 'A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Sea Power', of 2007, reflects similar strategic values to the 2010 national security strategy.³⁷ *The Diplomat* notes that this strategy 'reaffirms that the US Navy will remain the two-ocean navy it has been since Congress approved the Two-Ocean Navy Act in 1940, in anticipation of a two-front war against Germany and Japan. But the second ocean is no longer the Atlantic – it's the Indian Ocean and the adjacent Persian Gulf.'³⁸ US maritime strategy has moved beyond classic sea control and sea denial principles, to influencing events further ashore, as shown by current actions in Afghanistan and Yemen. Bolstered by forward deployment and presence, US forces in the Indian Ocean have secured geostrategic and geo-economic interests. The co-operative strategy states categorically, in a way that ensures the Carter Doctrine will endure and expand, that 'United States Sea Power will be globally postured to secure our homeland ... and to advance our interests around the world. ... We will employ global reach persistent presence and operational flexibility in US Sea Power to accomplish ... strategic imperatives'.³⁹

This strategy has allowed US forces to conduct both coercive and benign maritime operations, which has reinforced expeditionary operations and ensured high levels of deterrence in times of crisis. It has also enhanced maritime diplomacy in the form of joint

exercises, joint naval patrols, disaster relief and humanitarian operations and – importantly – assisting in the maintenance of good order at sea.

Currently, the US has facilities in Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Yemen, Djibouti, Changi in Singapore, and in northern Australia, with recent additions of the Reaper and Predator unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) based in Seychelles and Mauritius respectively, incorporating satellite information. These serve as ‘lily pads’⁴⁰ to respond to crises, with Diego Garcia remaining the hub of US naval involvement in the Indian Ocean.

The US is also augmenting African regional capabilities through technology transfers, including equipment handovers, which will enhance the combat, operational and management capabilities of African maritime militaries. Aside from deepening relations between the US and individual African countries or regions, the US is able to pass on skill sets required in a specific area and then withdraw, leaving the particular force to conduct the task. Or, in official parlance, ‘US Africa Command’s focus is to build capacity and capabilities among our African partners so that they are able to tackle Africa’s security challenges. We see US Africa Command’s role to be a supporting role.’⁴¹ AFRICOM personnel move to various African countries and assess:⁴²

[Their] capability to deploy personnel and equipment via aircraft to various operations on the African continent, and then to use those findings to custom design a lesson plan for an Africa Deployment Assistance Partnership Team (ADAPT) scheduled for June 2011 ... ADAPT aims to enhance the force projection capabilities of African militaries to better support peacekeeping operations, humanitarian relief operations and UN missions; foster positive relationships between US and African land forces; and increase deployment interoperability with US forces for joint or combined operations, training and exercises.

The US then remains in the background, often directing tasks and supplying required support.

China

The Indian Ocean has featured in China’s strategic thinking for centuries. Ancient Chinese seafarers sailed its waters initially to trade and then to exercise its domain power. Referring to observations by the English geographer Sir Halford McKinder about the Chinese, Robert Kaplan concludes that China ‘is both a land and sea power’.⁴³ Present Chinese maritime strategists clearly recognise that the Indian Ocean is crucial for China’s maritime trade lines of communication. China has used an ambitious three-pronged strategy to demonstrate its increased confidence and to give its navy greater operational experience.⁴⁴ In order ‘to secure China’s access to energy resources and to give it more diplomatic leverage in territorial disputes with its neighbours’,⁴⁵ this strategy seeks to combine maritime military training exercises with their inherent deterrent value, project power through extended range capabilities, as well as military diplomacy in the form of port calls and bilateral co-operation. Like most navies, China’s navy is responsible for ensuring maritime security, upholding the sovereignty of promulgated maritime zones and exercising maritime rights and interests. It consists of both nuclear and conventional forces.

China uses the Indian Ocean sea lanes for most of its trade with Africa. Coming off

a low base, China–Africa trade has grown substantially in the last decade. During 2010 trade surged by 43.5% and the value of two-way trade reached \$114.8 billion. China requires massive quantities of raw materials, as it seeks and develops new markets and the burgeoning economy expands. Ninety per cent of Africa’s exports to China comprise oil, minerals, base metals, stone products and raw logs, with 85% coming from only five oil and mineral exporting countries (Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo and Sudan). In 1992, China started importing oil from Africa, which now supplies more than one-third of China’s petroleum products.⁴⁶ China’s need for energy has led to trade with countries that are relatively unstable and have low accountability, governance and democratic levels. Some of this trade has also been shrouded in controversy, such as the arms trade with Sudan, which may have facilitated human rights abuses.⁴⁷

To consolidate and safeguard its energy sea lanes, and well aware of the value of maritime choke points, China has commenced a ‘string of pearls’ strategy, securing harbours, approaches, building military infrastructure and strategic locations in Myanmar, the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh and the Maldives. As a Chinese government agency stated, ‘The real threat to us is not posed by the pirates but by the countries which block our trade route.’⁴⁸ The UK’s *Financial Times* reported that the ‘Dragon “aggressively” pursues Mauritius as Africa hub’,⁴⁹ while lamenting India’s fragmented approach to Africa,⁵⁰ as ‘Chinese naval power in this part of the world will only increase. We [India] need to do our own thing to increase our own power’.⁵¹ China’s 2008 updated White Paper on National Defence states that, as a result of building an enhanced integrated logistical support, ‘a shore-based support system is basically in place, which is co-ordinated with the development of weaponry and equipment, and suited to wartime tasks.’⁵²

Strategically, China appears to be encircling India, in part to secure its extended and vulnerable energy trade route, but also to assert its dominance. Anti-piracy operations have given China’s navy an excellent excuse to ‘penetrate the Indian Ocean and station forces there permanently’.⁵³ While this move may be construed – somewhat jingoistically – as China becoming the ‘owner’ of the Indian Ocean,⁵⁴ it can also be considered ‘under the banner of internationalism’.⁵⁵ At a rare press briefing to announce that three warships were being dispatched on anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, a Chinese official stated that China was seriously considering building an aircraft carrier. Although no timescales were given, the *Ocean Development Report* of 2010 stated that ‘in 2009, China put forward a plan and a programme for building an aircraft carrier.’⁵⁶ Such a capability would extend and enhance its operational reach tremendously, catapulting China into a leading maritime military nation. The national defence white paper states that the People’s Liberation Army Navy has been striving to improve ‘its capabilities of integrated offshore operations, strategic deterrence and strategic counterattacks, and to gradually develop its capabilities of conducting co-operation in distant waters and countering non-traditional security threats.’⁵⁷

However, to ascribe aggressive maritime military posturing to the much-vaunted ‘pearls’ notion would be premature, especially given the language of the statements above. China’s maintenance of shipping companies’ facilities in other parts of the world does not translate into military presence or posturing, or provide a decided military strategic advantage. Nevertheless, it does allow China to engage in naval intelligence gathering, economic espionage and other covert activities, which in turn may result in the power of advance knowledge.⁵⁸

These events, as well as the rapid growth of the Chinese fleet, are worthy of continued observation, but China has a long way to sail in order to achieve its vision of being a genuine blue-water navy. This was confirmed by the most recent evaluation by the US Defence Department, which noted that China ‘remains a regional military force with a focus on its near-abroad – especially on Taiwan – and is not yet an extra-regional power.’⁵⁹

Russia

For Russia, the Indian Ocean’s importance lies in maintaining the world power balance commensurate with its perceived position as a world power, particularly in an oceanic area pivotal to medium- and long-term trade and energy flow. The Russian official media house, *Pravda*, quoted a geopolitical expert in November 2010 who said that ‘opening new naval bases in foreign countries is a noble initiative that Russia needs to pursue. Naval bases ensure influence ... in strategically important parts of the globe’.⁶⁰ It also allows Russia to react rapidly to changing political circumstances, in the same manner that the US is able to move aircraft carrier groups to areas of volatility.

Russia’s maritime ambitions are interesting, as most of the country’s oil exports are transported through pipelines, tankers, rail and road transport, not through her seaports.⁶¹ However, Russia is modernising the Syrian port of Tartus, that will ‘provide all the necessary support for the Russian warships which will be engaged in protecting commercial shipping around the Horn of Africa ... and significantly boosts Russia’s operational capability in the region because the warships based there are capable of reaching the Red Sea through the Suez Canal ... in a matter of days’.⁶²

After overcoming the systemic crises that followed in the wake of the Soviet Union’s collapse and to protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty, the Russian Federation’s new national security strategy was unveiled in May 2009. At its launch, President Medvedev said that the strategy ‘marked the end of the country’s transition period and its entry into a time of long-term strategic development’.⁶³ The strategy addresses the proposed management of new security situations that may develop, stresses the importance of maintaining the security of traditional issues such as territorial integrity (including international and regional co-operation, where it will follow a ‘rational and pragmatic’⁶⁴ foreign policy), and, in a new departure from older strategies, highlights economic security (with an emphasis on managing the acquisition of energy resources and associated security). The Russian Federation’s military policy is aimed at preventing an arms race, deterring and preventing military conflicts and improving military organisation, while also developing the means of attack for the purposes of defending and safeguarding the security of the Russian Federation and the interests of its allies. According to a senior official closely allied with Premier Vladimir Putin, from the Russian Federation Security Council Secretary, the Russian government’s focus is on ‘achieving an array of strategic national priorities that cover national economic development, creating high-tech industries, upgrading military forces and achieving decent living standards’.⁶⁵

Russia’s energy strategy is linked to its national security strategy, which contains goals such as the need to strengthen Russia’s position in the global energy market, optimise the efficiency of the export possibilities of the Russian energy sector, and ensure that Russian companies have equal access to foreign markets, technology, and financing. Its

energy policy makes provision for expanded export infrastructure to allow for domestic and foreign exports, maximising the use of its unique geostrategic position.⁶⁶ Therefore, included would be the assurance of its own SLOC, but (as an energy-exporting country) the motive is to ensure the reliability of its export of hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas), unlike other countries that need to secure supply lines for their imports.

Russia has observed the maritime developments in the region with great interest and is concerned about the apparent stealthy increase in maritime reach and inexorable permanency in the Indian Ocean by other UN permanent members and India. Russia appears to view India as a strategic counterweight to China, while also sharing interests in reducing regional violence, drug production and Islamic fundamentalism in South Asia.⁶⁷

Russia continues to move beyond merely observing events in the Indian Ocean, and in 2008 and 2010 held military exercises in the Indian Ocean, involving interoperability between the Russian Air Force (which included Tu-160 and Tu-95 strategic bombers) and its navy, which had received 'orders to ensure the security of Russian shipping in strategically and economically important zones.'⁶⁸ The warships that converged on the Indian Ocean sailed from far, including port calls and combined maritime exercises in Venezuela⁶⁹, Russia's northern fleet headquarters in Severomorsk and the Black Sea port of Sevastopol, and missile cruisers such as the Pyotr Veliky (nuclear-driven), Moskva and Slava class cruisers.

The Russian leadership believe that their influence in international affairs is in part based on the Russian economy's resurgence, despite being too heavily based on oil and gas, and its ability to project military power in its immediate region and beyond. Its deployments, not only in the Indian Ocean, demonstrate Russia's concern to secure its global interests, which commenced with then-President Vladimir Putin at the helm. In this respect, the Russian navy seems to be carving out for itself a significant role in the Indian Ocean – once frequented by Soviet maritime forces.

France

France has extensive maritime interests in the Indian Ocean, the consequence of its colonial era linkages, and has consistently emphasised its independent role. Accordingly, the strategy is shaped by the country's perception of being an independent great power with economic and security stakes, including the protection of its island territories in the Indian Ocean. France rejects the notion that it may be portrayed as an extra-regional power in the region, based on its entrenched position in the Indian Ocean. Although there may be other IOR nations that continue to perceive France as being an extra-regional power, France has indicated that changed circumstances will bring about a smaller French defence force, largely foisted upon it by monetary challenges.

Like the other significant maritime stakeholder nations in the Indian Ocean, France too has recently overhauled its Defence and National Security White Paper, which the French parliament approved in the first quarter of 2009.⁷⁰ It is only the third pronouncement on national and defence strategy since the founding of the Fifth Republic in October 1958 and the first in 14 years.⁷¹

The white paper highlights two of the four geographical areas that France perceives as critical and having major implications for the security of France and Europe: the 'arc of crisis from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean'⁷² and sub-Saharan Africa. The arc of crisis is a

combination of various sources of instability, proliferation and the increasing concentration of energy resources, while the sub-Saharan challenges are exacerbated by states failing, the pursuit for raw materials that pulls in new actors, unchecked urbanisation and disquieting linkages between crisis areas.⁷³

In 1978 France established extensive, exclusive, economic zones in the Indian Ocean, and thus maintains an impressive maritime capability in the Indian Ocean to safeguard its interests. In addition, the significant military and economic presence in the Reunion, Tromlein and Mayotte islands and facilities elsewhere in the sub-Antarctic, are described as part of France's remaining 'confetti of empire'.⁷⁴ In October 2010, France and Mauritius signed an accord to manage jointly the economic and environmental facets of the tiny island of Tromlein,⁷⁵ signifying a loosening of France's grip there. In contrast, Mayotte, in the Comoros archipelago, which was the only island in the group to vote in 1974 to keep its French linkage and sacrifice independence, in March 2009 voted by a large margin to become France's 101st department – and fifth overseas department – a change that will become statutory in 2011.⁷⁶

The French maritime forces are deployed in the Indian Ocean on a continuous basis. A dominant arms supplier, French military equipment can be found in the naval inventory of several countries of the Indian Ocean. The French forces joint command in the Indian Ocean (ALINDIEN) has its headquarters there and reports directly to the chief of the French defence force. ALINDIEN initiates and participates in large maritime exercises with Indian Ocean littoral and island states, promotes peace and security in the region and performs operational tasks under international law and UN auspices. These tasks can include evacuating French and other nationals, conducting humanitarian operations and protecting SLOC (providing convoy escorts, if necessary, to oil tankers transiting the Red Sea).⁷⁷ French forces in the South Pacific transit through the Indian Ocean in order to take up their deployment stations, showing naval presence and conducting military maritime diplomacy en route.

The lingering world economic predicament has forged a 'practical' and 'hardheaded'⁷⁸ *entente frugale*⁷⁹ between two of the major stakeholders in the Indian Ocean – Britain and France. In a wry reference to *entente cordiale*, this term refers to co-operation by these two governments, particularly in military procurement, which was largely initiated by cost constraints. Together Britain and France account for half of the EU's military, and about two-thirds of research and development, expenditure. The countries also have a number of proposed activities that could lead to greater combined military force deployment and may well be the first step towards a unified EU defence structure, which in turn may be the beginnings of structural and strategic adjustments by the West.

United Kingdom

To appreciate the UK's entrenched position, a quick dip into the sea of Britain's imperial developments in the Indian Ocean is necessary.

From the middle of the 18th century, after the Seven Years War (1756–63), Britain commenced the convoluted process to subjugate India and establish unprecedented control in the Indian Ocean. From 1890, several vital Indian Ocean ports were taken or created: Colombo, Cape Town, Singapore, Aden, Mumbai, Mombasa and Hong Kong (although Chennai's construction was only completed in 1925). Unchallenged in the Indian Ocean,

Britain needed little force to ensure sea control, compared to that required in other, more contested oceans. Thus British imperial power was a distinguishing attribute of the Indian Ocean well into the 20th century.⁸⁰

In the 1950s and 1960s, notwithstanding the ‘winds of change’ sweeping through its empire, Britain was able to consolidate its strategic hold in the Indian Ocean. The independence of Mauritius in March 1968 was on condition that the British be allowed to purchase the Chagos Archipelago, 1 500 nautical miles to the north-east. This issue was forced on Mauritius, despite the UN General Assembly calling on Britain to ‘take no action that would dismember the territory of Mauritius’.⁸¹ During the Cold War, Mauritius and other Indian Ocean islands were important to South Africa, Britain, France and the US due to landing rights, the trade routes (especially for oil tankers from the Gulf), potential offshore oil deposits in East Africa and the need to monitor Soviet shipping, warships and (nuclear) submarines. These factors remain strategically valid, apart from those related to the Soviet Union.

Diego Garcia, with its massive lagoon in the Chagos Archipelago, sitting astride the trade routes, was especially critical. In 1966, Britain entered into a defence agreement with the US, leasing Diego Garcia, or the British Indian Ocean Territory (its official name), to the US for 50 years, with an option for another 20 years. The territory has become an important intelligence-gathering station and base for allied forces’ military air and naval operations, used in both Gulf wars and in Afghanistan.

In October 2010, the UK Government published a national security strategy, *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*, which reappraises the country’s role in the world, evolving security risks and associated implications, in tandem with *The Strategic Defence and Security Review*. The review examines security risk management issues, focusing on effective and rapid reaction to threats, and emphasises that, although the UK will have reduced resources, a key objective is to ‘shape a stable world by acting to reduce the likelihood of risks affecting the UK or British interests overseas, and applying our instruments of power and influence to shape the global environment’.⁸²

The review reduced the defence budget for the medium-term by 8% in real terms, which undoubtedly presents a serious challenge for the British government and will require innovative management to achieve the same quality of outputs. One solution appears to be closer, integrated co-operation with allies on common defence issues, such as the new programme of co-operation announced by British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy soon after the release of the review. The overarching Defence Co-operation Treaty would include joint training, co-operation on equipment and technology and better information sharing.⁸³

There is little doubt that the British global footprint will be reduced, including in the Indian Ocean. As Britain’s coalition leaders, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, concede in the preface to the national security strategy document, ‘as the balance of global power shifts, it will become “harder” for Britain to project its influence abroad’,⁸⁴ or as *The Economist* notes ‘Say what you like about the British: we manage our decline with style’.⁸⁵

India in the Indian Ocean

The international sea lanes that cross the Indian Ocean are of vital importance to India, to sustain its fast growing economy and trade. The world economy – particularly the

‘demand heartland’ of China, India and Japan – is heavily dependent on oil and gas carried by tankers from the Persian Gulf, and increasingly from Africa, across the Indian Ocean. Any disruption to this energy flow has immediate effects on energy costs and the world economy, and the potential of increasing tensions exists in an area of the world already riven by conflicts.⁸⁶

In May 2007, India promulgated its *Freedom to Use the Seas: India’s Maritime Military Strategy*, which provides a succinct linkage between national security strategy and maritime strategy.⁸⁷

In the modern context, Grand Strategy has to increasingly take into consideration the complex amalgam of globalised economies, modern societies juxtaposed with conflicting ideologies of fundamentalism and obscurantism. Thus it is necessary to consider non-military aspects – economic, political, psychological and sociological – in any Grand Strategy. Thus, the Grand Strategy is more than just a military concept, tending towards the coordinated execution of statecraft in support of national interests and involving numerous agencies besides the Armed Forces. Grand Strategy has to increasingly take into consideration the complex amalgam of globalised economies and modern societies juxtaposed with conflicting ideologies of fundamentalism and obscurantism.

Joint Military Strategy is one instrument of the Grand Strategy along with economic and diplomatic strategies. In the modern context, The Joint Military Strategy is one of the subsets of the Grand Strategy which reflects the nation’s attitude towards war and the use of military force to attain political ends. From the Joint Military Strategy flow the single service strategies, namely, Land, Maritime and Air.

India’s energy demands are very high and increasing. Already the sixth-highest energy consumer in the world, India is projected to be the third-highest by 2030, based on its anticipated increased consumption. Long-term security of energy has become a primary strategic concern for India, which ‘must place itself on a virtual war footing’⁸⁸ to achieve the energy security necessary for its sustained growth. India’s maritime strategy therefore prioritises the protection of its offshore oil and gas fields, existing and future deep-sea drilling programmes in its vast exclusive economic zone and associated infrastructure (including pumping stations, ports, pipeline grids and refineries).

In response to China’s advances in the Indian Ocean, the navy aims to modernise its fleet, including building of a medium-sized aircraft carrier. India launched its first nuclear submarine in July 2009, purchased new destroyers and an aircraft carrier from Russia, and further warships from the US. Yet, China’s plans, to build aircraft carriers and boost its own submarine fleet, far outstrip those of New Delhi. India has expanded defence contacts and exchanges with a host of strategic Indian Ocean countries and archipelago nations such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Madagascar and the Maldives. It is also engaging in naval exercises with other East Asian and South-East Asian nations, such as Japan and Vietnam, wary of China’s growing stature. However, China also maintains solid relationships with many of these countries – ties that in most cases bind far tighter and offer much more than what poorer India can muster.

India has recently increased political attention on Africa, viewing its role as that of a partner for countries to benefit from a secure maritime domain, so as to ensure enhanced

development. India hopes to be able to go some way to challenging China for the best contracts and deals in Africa, while the Indian navy is active along the East African coast, an area of continued maritime insecurity.⁸⁹

For India, the very visible presence of extra-regional navies shows that other states are interested in the Indian Ocean region. In IOR countries and island states, major powers have stationed a variety of maritime 'assets', ranging from carrier battle groups, to forward bases, to maritime patrol aircraft and UAVs. India continues to observe China's toe-holds in the IOR in order to gauge its intentions.⁹⁰ India and Mauritius seem to have resumed discussions over a proposal to hand over the twin islands of Agalega to India either on long-lease or through perpetual ceding of control. The land could be used for agriculture and other strategic purposes by India.⁹¹

India therefore enacts its maritime strategy by ensuring that perceived legitimate threats are not realised. The network of co-operative partnerships, which it continues to build with select IOR nations and extra-regional powers, is designed to 'increase Indian influence in the region, acquire more strategic space and strategic autonomy, and create a safety cushion for itself'. In other words, '[t]o spread its leverage ... India is mixing innovative diplomatic cocktails that blend trade agreements, direct investment, military exercises, aid funds, energy co-operation and infrastructure-building'.⁹² An excellent illustration of this type of creative thinking lies in India's initiation of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), (see below) which has effectively consolidated IOR maritime defence and security institutional mechanisms.

It is clear that India remains particularly effective at harnessing the range of available forces and resources in order to shape its strategic environment.

Japan

To many observers, Japan's involvement in the Indian Ocean appears to be low key. However, delve deeper and Japan can be found close to the centre of maritime action in the Indian Ocean region. Japan is the world's number two naval power, when measured by most standards,⁹³ and the capabilities of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force have been incrementally and quite efficiently racked up since the early 1990s. Over the past decade 'through changes in law, foreign policy and security high level doctrine, operational guidelines for co-operation with US forces, Self-Defence Force rules of engagement, force structure, and military planning, Japan has removed many of the pre-existing restraints on the use of its already materially extremely powerful military forces',⁹⁴ with a slew of legislative, doctrinal and organisational transformations brought about by post-9/11 terror attacks on the US.

The latest defence white paper, published in September 2010, sets a new goal for Japan: that of 'dynamic defense',⁹⁵ as opposed to the static position held previously. Basing its defensive measures on high degrees of bilateral co-operation with the US, the white paper points out that 'in future the comparative superiority of the United States will decline in terms of the military and other areas', which represents an opportunity for greater international co-ordination and co-operation.⁹⁶

Japan has been involved in the Indian Ocean for a number of years, largely conducting 'maritime interdiction operations' in concert with the US and British navies. In the process, it has gained excellent experience at being a professional navy, capable of maintaining

high-intensity inter-operability with other navies in combined operations,⁹⁷ aligning it with its perception as a world-class maritime combat service and making it an indispensable maritime military partner.

Like the other navies in this survey, Japan has understood the benefits of an 'own' base away from home and is building a base in Djibouti for military personnel engaged in anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden region. The new base will be the first foreign Japanese military base since the Second World War.⁹⁸ Besides the maritime patrol aircraft already in Djibouti, the base will certainly facilitate logistics, maintenance, medical and other services. The new base is significant also because it underscores the extent of the measures that a pacifist nation like Japan is prepared to take in order to ensure its security of trade and energy.⁹⁹ These security operations contribute to ensuring the safe and secure passage of Japan's considerable maritime trade.

AFRICA AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE INDIAN OCEAN

The preceding part of the paper analysed the dynamics of main and extra-regional stakeholder nations off Africa's eastern seaboard, the Indian Ocean. This portion of the Indian Ocean includes Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa (east of Cape Agulhas); as well as the island states off Africa (Mauritius, Seychelles, the Comoros (not including Mayotte; French) and Madagascar).

This study now addresses how Africa has responded, at continental maritime military level, to the escalating dynamics off its eastern and southern coastal zone in the Indian Ocean. Africa, as a continent and as individual states, needs to be proactive, so as not to become dependent on external actors or be forced to react to external agendas that impact on its vital interests.

All of the nations surveyed above are involved to some degree with maritime military engagement and co-operation in Africa, mostly at bilateral level. At continental level, the African Union (AU) has responded to initiatives from the EU, the US, China, France and India – countries/region that have institutionalised political mechanisms to deal with security issues as part of devolved processes. Its response has generally been to accept invitations to conferences and to establish and institutionalise mechanisms with these partners. The process then is for the AU to devolve to its member states the decisions and actions required for implementation against agreed target dates. However, the AU has insufficient capacity to deal with often technical issues, and the legal and/or scientific expertise provided by these extraneous stakeholders often shape Africa's response and effectiveness.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, African states themselves generally do not possess the capacity to monitor and implement, to the required standard and at the right time, the high volume of resolutions and actions that emanate either from its continental or their regional structures; the result is often 'no action taken'. The general impression of Africa's maritime initiatives seems to be 'how passive Africa has been in this whole affair'.¹⁰¹ The following section therefore gives an overview of the institutional mechanisms that operate in the maritime military domain, as they affect or are given effect to, by Africa.

First, it is important to analyse the maritime requirements of Africa's navies, which do not need to have global reach, or be very sophisticated in terms of maritime platforms or

weapons technology. In essence, they need to ‘outgun’ identified adversaries – typically maritime criminals, pirates, illegal fishing boats and trawlers and human traffickers – that traditionally do not possess much in the way of armament. Hence, most African navies or coast guards only need to fulfil their maritime constabulary duties. Objectively stated, Africa’s navies need to ensure compliance with international maritime law, specifically the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982 and a number of other legal prescripts in the provision of maritime service; to which they are signatories.

Coastal and island states have been given vast tracts of seaward estate by virtue of the international community and through UNCLOS. The *quid pro quo* is that they need to be able to enforce maritime law and ensure good maritime order. Hence, Africa’s navies need suitable ocean-going ships able to provide the necessary geographical coverage, with well-trained officers and sailors and professional and adequate logistics (docking and repair facilities, logistic matériel support). Yet, the navies of East Africa, apart from South Africa, Egypt and Kenya, would be classified as coastal or token navies, reflecting the very low priority of maritime issues on their governments’ agendas.¹⁰² Most of all, political will is necessary so that navies receive priority funding, along with land and air military components.

THE AFRICAN UNION’S MARITIME STRATEGY

The AU is developing an integrated maritime strategy. This multi-layered strategy has two aims: to address Africa’s seaborne challenges and to sustain more wealth from the oceans that surround the continent. In early April 2010, as part of the inclusive process to develop this strategy, the AU hosted an ‘experts’ workshop on maritime security and safety’. One of the workshop’s recommendations was that the workshop ‘should be followed by a series of other activities aimed at raising awareness among the key stakeholders of the continent, mobilising the indispensable political will, building capacity at all levels, securing the required resources, as well as building partnerships’.¹⁰³ However, the integrated maritime safety and security strategy for Africa appears to be a work in progress, a paper tiger.

The AU’s belated development of an integrated maritime strategy reflects in many ways the challenges facing the Sea Power for Africa Symposiums (SPASs). The AU only started this project in earnest in 2010, and years after the navies of the world began the World Food Programme ship protection/anti-piracy operations off Somalia, following several United Nations Security Council resolutions to curb Somalia’s territorial integrity and sovereignty so that maritime and military forces can operate within an extended international law framework. The AU barely recognises the importance of maritime affairs on countries’ economies and socio-economic development, the result of a ‘landward centric’ basis for managing security related issues. Hence, too few resources are allocated to maritime forces, infrastructure, training and logistics (such as dry-docks and maintenance facilities). The probability that the continental strategy will be implemented and sustained is low, as the responsibility for enacting the strategy will fall on national navies, which are – with very few exceptions – severely under-resourced.

THE DEFENCE AND SECURITY ELEMENT OF THE INDIAN OCEAN RIM ASSOCIATION FOR REGIONAL CO-OPERATION AND THE INDIAN OCEAN NAVAL SYMPOSIUM

The Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation (IOR-ARC) was formed in Mauritius on 6–7 March 1997 and now comprises 18 member states.¹⁰⁴ It is primarily an outward-looking forum for economic dialogue, focusing mainly on economic co-operation, in particular trade and investment, and pursues a policy of open regionalism.¹⁰⁵

The ‘open regionalism’ cornerstone of IOR-ARC has an Achilles heel because it does not address defence and security co-operation in a direct manner through an institutional forum. This oversight is somewhat ironic, as the very tenets of the numerous references to ‘trade’ in its charter are founded upon maritime security. Therefore, the IOR-ARC forum has never quite activated the defence and security portion of its structure. The non-co-operation on defence and security is perhaps explained by this statement from its charter, ‘[the] IOR-ARC explicitly excludes bilateral relations and other issues likely to generate controversy and be an impediment to regional co-operation’.¹⁰⁶

Seizing the security vacuum within IOR-ARC, India created IONS, comprising the maritime security elements of all IOR countries, which involves its members through active participation and ongoing programmes. India has ensured that potential adversaries and interested parties, such as Pakistan and the US, are included and accorded observer status. Except for Somalia, all Africa’s navies on its eastern seaboard – from Egypt through to the island states and down to South Africa – are members of IONS. IONS contains diverse nations that appear to be united in a common cause – to safeguard the Indian Ocean so that seafarers can ply their legitimate business at sea. To avoid being perceived as IONS hegemon, India has passed IONS chair to other navies, while continuing to keep a beady eye on its creation. In the absence of formal statements, critical success factors for institutions such as IONS could be organisational dynamics that go beyond essay competitions, technical seminars, regular member conferences, i.e. ‘typical talk shop’ status, via mechanisms that would include confidence-building mechanisms (especially for those states that traditionally do not see eye to eye) and a steady decline in illegal maritime activities in the Indian Ocean. This would involve, for instance, legal instruments, regional co-operation and the transfer of skills, which appear to be already in full swing, based on a number of activities planned by IONS.¹⁰⁷

It is probably too late for IOR-ARC to initiate and operationalised its security structure, as this would duplicate the already-functional and very active IONS institution. The challenge for the nations of IONS is to co-operate and collaborate to ensure permanent maritime security in this major maritime arena, which is unlikely to happen due to scarce maritime resources and the need to act productively. Again, as with the belated reaction to maritime piracy, another maritime initiative has been (successfully) launched from beyond Africa, and Africa has been reactive.

THE SEA POWER FOR AFRICA SYMPOSIUMS

The navies of Africa continue to try to change. One initiative, which has had limited success, is the SPAS. Every second year, the US Navy hosts an International Sea Power

Symposium (ISS), and, following the 2003 ISS, the navy chiefs of South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana and Kenya jointly proposed a similar continental event. In 2005, the South African Navy duly hosted the inaugural event, called the Sea Power for Africa Symposium, which was followed a year later by the Nigerian Navy. After a lull in proceedings, the third symposium took place in March 2009, again hosted by the South African Navy. The Libyan Navy has apparently offered to host the next event in 2011. The participation by the AU, its navies and coast guards was useful, as maritime issues moved, albeit temporarily, to centre stage. SPAS's management model is based on the resolutions passed at the end of each SPAS, which bind each of the attendees to achieve stated maritime objectives within a stipulated time frame. The extensive resolutions range from co-operation issues, technical subjects, joint acquisition and procurement of maritime logistics, maritime training and standards, obtaining mandates from respective national governments, to matters of hydrography.¹⁰⁸

A continental working group, usually comprising one member each of the northern, western, southern and eastern African regional economic community is appointed, with the task to ensure compliance with the agreed resolutions' implementation and time scales from SPAS members. The weakness (and where it fails) appears to be that member states – buoyed by the Symposium – commit themselves to unachievable targets. The maritime countries in general lack the political will to ensure effective maritime programmes. Although SPAS aims, objectives and management model are laudable, its outcomes and effects have been minimal – it has been long on words and short on action: in essence the navies of Africa agree to meet again.

ALL AT SEA: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The words of Alfred Thayer Mahan, as noted in the introduction, are beginning to ring true.

For countries that rely on the Indian Ocean region, the kernel of the geostrategic positioning of maritime forces in the Indian Ocean lies in ensuring energy security and trade on one hand and enhanced projected economic growth on the other.

The Indian Ocean is increasingly being managed by navies and a variety of regional (security) organisations as an important theatre in an operations-other-than-war scenario. Much has to do with perceptions about the true intentions of other nations in the area, the need to remain abreast (at least) or ahead (better) of other, similar nations present in the Indian Ocean. This type of distrust is evident among the 'demand heartland' countries, where (for instance) at a presentation, Japanese defence scholars stated that 'Japan is very much concerned over the alarming build up by the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean'.¹⁰⁹

However, what underpins these virtual political manoeuvres and the associated naval chess game is clearly not just the security of energy routes (especially for the three nations of the 'demand heartland', noted above), but also the wider guarantee of ensuring maritime trade in the Indian Ocean region. In some ways, the build-up represents an arms race in a geographically confined area, where dominance may be critical in a realist, survivalist sense.

However, a movement from rivalry to conflict is not inevitable. As they establish themselves in the Indian Ocean, India and China need some kind of *modus vivendi*, but

few can predict what that may look like. Part of the problem is that, despite booming trade between India and China, their governments share little political understanding. 'They engage very superficially ... 'There's rarely consensus on any of the fundamental issues.' Comparisons have even been made between India and China's current rapport and the misunderstandings between the US and Japan in the early 20th century. Although in a vastly different context, the two countries are clandestinely probing and feeling out each other's geopolitical intentions in an eerily similar fashion.¹¹⁰

The other side of the coin indicates that the strategic aims of other countries' naval forces converge in most cases, making the likelihood of increased tension low. In fact, managed with diplomatic skill, having similarly focused objectives will lead to increased co-operation, as nations co-operate to defeat common scourges and threats.

To safeguard their vast requirement for oil and other natural resources, particularly drawn from Africa, most of the major powers have embarked on similar strategies to safeguard their maritime energy and trade passages en route, variously called 'string of pearls' or 'lily pads'. Bases and intelligence posts belonging to major powers now dot the IOR, from the Malacca Straits to the Cape of Good Hope. These 'offboard' bases can have significant, and potentially negative, effects at regional forums or even the continental structure, should different African countries insist on supporting 'their' great power to have greater say in the affairs of Africa. In a way, this could be regarded as proxy political wars fought by lesser endowed African states on behalf of their great power benefactors.

Foreign Affairs suggests that the US, which is still the world's preeminent military power, could be the chief 'balancer' and 'honest broker' in the Indian Ocean, but the idea has been received icily in Asia, where many governments see the US as a nation in decline, marooned in costly adventures abroad and led by an Obama administration unwilling to confront the aggressive posturing of a rising giant like China. It would be better, says Bhaskar, for India and China to forge slowly a constructive pan-Asian consensus and do away with the 'post-colonial baggage' that animates the current Sino-Indian border dispute. However, as talk of a new Asian 'Great Game' gains favour, history and geography may not be so easy to overcome.¹¹¹

The International Maritime Organisation (IMO), a UN agency, needs to increase its resources and capacities to facilitate the management of achievable maritime programmes, in particular in relation with the AU. Further, the maritime nations reviewed in this paper have vested, developmental and co-operation interests in Africa, and they should make their interaction with the AU transparent and contingent upon the achievement of successful and sustained maritime programmes. Again, these should be under managed in co-operation with IMO. Institutionalised structures in Africa (SPAS) and the Indian Ocean (IONS) need to be aligned with the African Union's maritime programme, so that cohesiveness and productivity drives the already meagre (maritime) resources.

The ship of state will continue to run aground, until countries, regional and continental structures in Africa show the political will to turn the ship around and sail in the direction of maritime development, sustained resource allocation and co-operation. The Indian Ocean is also Africa's ocean, and the nations of Africa need to show pro-active ownership and management of its eastern seaboard, for only then will stability, development and co-operation ensure that the benefits flow towards the continent.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Quote taken from Ghosh PK, 'Maritime security challenges in South Asia and the Indian Ocean: response strategies', a paper prepared for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, American–Pacific Sealanes Security Institute conference on Maritime Security in Asia, Honolulu, Hawaii, 18–20 January 2004.
- 2 Mahan AT, *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History 1660–1783*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co, 1890. Copyright 1918 by Ellen Lyle Mahan, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13529/13529-h/13529-h.htm>, accessed 25 October 2010, p. 25.
- 3 Sir Julian Corbett, referred to in Till G, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-first Century*. London: Frank Cass, 2004, p. 4.
- 4 Businessdictionary.com, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/globalization.html#ixzz13D3Z5dE3>, accessed 23 October 2010.
- 5 However, it does not include the unfettered movement of labour. Globalisation, as suggested by certain economists, may hurt smaller or fragile economies if applied indiscriminately. Business Dictionary, *Ibid*.
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