THE INDO-PACIFIC AS AN EMERGING REGIONAL CONSTRUCT: A SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific is a term increasingly used by the global community to describe the geographical space reaching across the sea from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific islands which covers oceans and interconnecting seas by some of the world's most lucrative trading networks (Reva, 2021).

The region is characterised by both cooperation and contestation as a growing number of rivalries is manifesting amongst established and emerging powers. The potential for cooperation and partnerships with a view to ensuring sustainable development is increasingly overshadowed by competition and rivalries which have the potential to create a climate of increasing instability and uncertainty. The sharp focus on the Indo-Pacific in recent times signals the "geo-strategic" importance of this region to the global community.

While the Indo-Pacific is seen by some as a strategy of containment, South Africa views the Indo-Pacific as being focused on cooperation, partnership and development addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment. Viewed in this context the Indo-Pacific can be a powerful force for global good ensuring a region of peace and stability that focusses on the key developmental challenges and opportunities of the Indo-Pacific region.

The rise of China and its growing global influence including in the Indo Pacific has introduced a new dynamic to the region. This coupled with the rise of other major fast developing economies within the Indo-Pacific has further complicated the global power dynamic within the Indo-Pacific. The increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific is attested to by the number of countries that have formulated strategic vision documents on the Indo-Pacific. Increasingly, regional organisations such as ASEAN and the EU, have also articulated positions on the Indo Pacific. Thus far, none of the African countries including the African Union (AU) and the regional economic communities (RECs) have articulated a vision or position on the Indo-Pacific.

It is worth noting that some of the countries that have formulated a position on the Indo-Pacific have omitted the littoral states of Southern and Eastern Africa bordering the Indian Ocean as part of the Indo-Pacific region. Africa's 13 littoral and small island states of Southern and Eastern Africa must be seen to be an integral part of the Indo-Pacific. For South Africa and the African continent, the Indo-Pacific is key to its security, economic and developmental agenda. For South Africa, the Indo-Pacific is seen as straddling the regions of Southern and East Africa stretching to the Western and Central Pacific regions of Japan and Australia and even further to the West Coast of the USA. The natural linkages of the African continent to the Indian Ocean and therefore the Indo-Pacific region cannot be overstated.

According to the Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies (KIPPS) 2021, Africa seems to have been more or less side-lined in the strategies of major stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific and the African countries have not endorsed their own strategies for the region.

The Indo-Pacific as it relates to Africa "commonly includes the east coast of Africa comprised of 13 countries that share a border with the Indian Ocean as follows, i) South Africa, ii) Mozambique, iii) Tanzania, iv) Somalia, v) Kenya, vi) Madagascar, vii) Comoros, viii) Seychelles, ix) Mauritius, x) Eritrea, xi) Sudan, xii) Egypt and xiii) Djibouti which lie in the Red Sea" (KIPPS, 2021). The geo-political contestation and manoeuvres in the region have long-term effects and impacts on the African Continent.

In recent years, the rapid rise and growth of emerging markets and developing countries of both the Indian and the Pacific Ocean has led to increased attention and focus on this region. One of the outcomes of this rapid growth has been the proliferation of military bases. The long-term security implications of such bases on the African Continent have been raised as a concern by the African Union's Peace and Security Council (AUPSC). The situation is exacerbated by the AUPSC's inability to effectively "monitor the movement of weapons in-and-out of these bases" (KIPPS, 2021).

For South Africa, the Indian Ocean region is of great strategic importance and value to the African continent and the world. It is of utmost importance to safeguard and develop the region for the benefit of all its peoples. Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that Africa and the rest of the Indian Ocean Region need a new regional architecture to deal with the myriad security and socio-economic challenges facing the Indian Ocean Region. This includes increased militarization of the Indian Ocean strategic chokepoints with vast regions of the ocean 'unpoliced' as well as lax maritime awareness by African countries due to capacity constraints. Furthermore, increased naval competition between major maritime powers and its impact on the affected littoral states continues unabated. The security environment is further complicated by non-traditional maritime security challenges such as, terrorism, climate change, environmental degradation, the unregulated exploitation of marine resources and illegal trafficking (arms, drugs, people) (DIRCO, 2015).

In this context, Africa's maritime security and defence processes could be recognised as significant with regards to Africa's regional security in the Indian Ocean Region. However, with a stretched capability to oversee its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region, it has become near impossible to monitor developments and strategize an outlook for Africa in the broader Indo-Pacific Region. Furthermore, for South Africa as a medium power whose interests are also directly affected, it will be difficult for South Africa and other African countries to balance the theatre of great-power contestation, particularly as it relates to the country's strategic partners who are trying to maintain dominance and asserting their own power dynamic in the

region. A particular potential effective solution to the African dilemma regarding enhanced participation in the Indo-Pacific Region could be to support an open and inclusive Indo-Pacific underpinned by a rules-based security architecture.

Thus, the different interpretations of the Indo-Pacific seem to depend on the geographic proximity, maritime capabilities, security risk assessments and possible alignment with regional outlooks. In this regard, countries of the African continent must ensure that they don't fall in the sphere of major power rivalries and seen to be taking sides in the power contestations emerging within the Indo-Pacific. For South Africa and Africa, the focus has to be on partnership, cooperation and development in a people-centred Indo-Pacific that is open and inclusive underpinned by peace and stability.

South Africa in the Indo-Pacific

For South Africa, the Indo-Pacific should be an integral part of both its cooperation and development paradigm. The Indo-Pacific must address South Africa's foreign policy priorities while also speaking to its national interest in addressing the well-being and prosperity of its people.

The Indo-Pacific must be a people-centred, people-driven and an inclusive region where no one is left behind. The paper will thus examine the Indo-Pacific from the perspective of the key pillars of South Africa's foreign policy priorities namely, advancing the African Union's (AU) African Agenda, promoting regional integration and cooperation, advancing South-South Solidarity, promoting mutually beneficial relations with the global North and contributing to the reform and strengthening of the multilateral system thereby creating a more inclusive, equitable and rules-based global governance architecture (DIRCO, 2016).

The Indo-Pacific: South Africa Advancing the African Agenda

The Indo-Pacific becomes critical in advancing the African Union's developmental agenda as articulated in Agenda 2063. It must provide a platform that contributes to a prosperous Africa which seeks to have inclusive growth and sustainable development as well as supporting and promoting peace, security, cooperation and development. The long-term effects of this will contribute to creating a stable region whereby the strategic utilization of the seas and the oceans for the continents own development would emerge. Peace and security are the precursors to development.

In this regard, the Continent can ill-afford disruptions and fallouts from great power contestations in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly as the two major powers, China and the US, are important partners in Africa's development. Furthermore, the Continent has its own security challenges in the numerous conflicts, the scourge of terrorism and external interferences which undermine the vision of Agenda 2063 in achieving an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa as articulated in the 'silencing of the guns' initiative of the AU (Musau, 2019).

In terms of economic relations, the potential of Africa's oceans economy, which is three times the size of its land mass, must be a major contributor to Continental transformation and growth. Africa's coastline of over 13 million square kilometres has the potential to dramatically transform Africa's development once the full impact of the ocean and seas is fully harnessed. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific becomes critical in Africa's own development paradigm.

The focus of the Indo-Pacific on development should benefit Africa and its people in several ways ; i) to provide a high standard of living, quality of life and well-being for Africans; ii) transforming the economy towards being inclusive and sustainable, iii) increasing levels of regional and continental integration, iv) a population of empowered women and youth and a society in which children are cared for and protected, v) societies that are peaceful, demonstrate good democratic values and practice good governance principles and which preserve and enhance Africa's cultural identity, as stipulated and envisioned in Agenda 2063 (Agenda 2063, 2015).

The Indo-Pacific must also be viewed within the vision of the African Union's (AU) Decade of African Seas and Oceans 2015 – 2025 as well as Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS) 2050. The overarching vision of the 'AIMS' is to foster increased wealth creation from Africa's oceans and seas by developing the blue economy in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner. The strategy provides a broad framework for the protection and sustainable exploitation of the seas and oceans.

In this regard, it is of concern that over 46% of Africans live in abject poverty whilst vast ocean resources like fish stocks could make a vital contribution to food and nutritional security of over 200 million Africans and provide an income for over 10 million. This anomaly is further exacerbated by the low adaptive capacity of the continent regarding the marine and coastal areas rendering them the most vulnerable areas to the impacts of climate change. In addition, maritime security is also one of the most significant dimensions of global and human security and thus poses multidimensional threats to global security with major effects on essential issues such as food, energy and economic security (Zuma, 2015).

Africa has for the last decade become an epicentre of international maritime security with piracy and armed robbery at sea re-emerging off the east and west coasts of Africa causing enormous human suffering and financial damage. Further breaches of maritime security have been reported as being on the rise in African seas for example; i) illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, ii) toxic waste dumping and, iii) human, weapons and narcotics trafficking (Zuma, 2015). Consequently, AIMS provides, i) a comprehensive understanding of existing and potential challenges, including allocation of resources to identified priorities over a pre-determined time-frame, ii) a comprehensive, concerted coherent and coordinated approach that improves maritime conditions with respect to environmental and socio-economic

development as well as the capacity to generate wealth from sustainable governance of African seas and oceans (Zuma, 2015).

In the case of South Africa as a country fortunate to be washed by two oceans, the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, it has recognised the strategic importance of the oceans and the seas to its own development and that of the African Continent. In terms of maritime security, the National Development Plan 2030 has reflected South Africa's concern regarding piracy which has the potential to put the continent's coasts and ports under increasing pressure, especially as South Africa is heavily dependent on maritime trade. In this regard, South Africa played an instrumental role in promoting the adoption of the Maritime Security Strategy of the Southern African Development Community in 2011 (Mishra, 2021).

Furthermore, in terms of economic relations, South Africa unveiled its Oceans Economy Strategy – Operation Phakisa in 2013 to fully harness the potential of the oceans economy. Therefore, for South Africa the Indo-Pacific must evolve to be inclusive and viewed as fostering peace, security, cooperation and socio-economic development. The Indo-Pacific region can play an important role in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as a practical contribution to the economic development of Africa.

The AfCFTA seeks to accelerate and grow intra-African trade and boost Africa's trading position in the global market place. It aims to significantly accelerate growth of intra-Africa trade and use trade more effectively as an engine of growth and sustainable development by doubling intra-Africa trade, strengthening Africa's common voice and policy space in global trade negotiations. The agreement will serve as a further potential vehicle for Africa's economic transformation which through its various protocols can facilitate the movement of persons and labour, competition, investment and intellectual property. It has the potential to lift 30 million people out of extreme poverty as it connects 1.3 billion people across 55 countries with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) valued at US$3.4 trillion (Kinyua, Walker, Reva: 2021). This single, continent wide market for goods and services, business and investment would reshape African economies in the near future.

Some of the key viewpoints regarding the AfCFTA is that it; (i) can represent a major opportunity for countries to boost growth, reduce poverty, and broaden economic inclusion, ii) reduce extreme poverty across the continent but in particular, provide major gains to countries with high poverty rates like Guinea-Bissau, Mali and Togo, iii) boost Africa's income gains to an amount of approximately $292 billion coming through tariff liberalization and strong trade facilitation which could include measures that reduces red tape, simplifies customs procedures and African businesses integration into global supply chains, iv) increased regional trade, lowering of trade costs and streamlining of border procedures, the full implementation of AfCFTA would help African countries increase their resilience in the face of future economic

shocks and help usher in the kinds of deep reforms that are necessary to enhance long-term growth (Maliszewska, Ruta, Arenas, et al., 2020).

In order to ensure that Africa is in a constant environment of Peace and Security that is conducive to development, addressing issues of conflict, terrorism and external interference, Agenda 2063 provided a guideline for an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa through the 'silencing of the guns' initiative. Despite of the failure in the implementation of the 'silencing the guns by 2020' in Africa, issues such as poverty, unemployment, climate change came to light as root causes of violence on the continent. However, marginalization, identity crisis, historical legacies and perceptions of injustice also came across as underlying causes of violence, conflict and instability (Musau, 2019).

The AU Africa's Agenda 2063 as well as the AfCFTA whilst focused on Africa's development and prosperity is integrally linked with the global economy as well as the peace and security architecture. The Indo-Pacific is configured for fully realising the potential of Agenda 2063 and the AfCFTA as it is the main conduit through which Africa conducts a major part of its global geo-political and geo-economic relations.

Advancing the African Agenda through SADC

The growing militarisation and extensive foreign military presence in the Indo-Pacific region is a source of concern for African countries and could have a destabilising effect. Further militarisation in the Indian Ocean driven by geo-political competition in the Indo-Pacific is counter to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and South Africa's strategic interests as it undermines peace, stability, and development in the region. The region has witnessed an increased military and naval presence owing to the geostrategic rivalry over the Sea Lines of Communication (Mishra, 2021). As a counter, the SADC adopted the Maritime Security Strategy in 2011. It is estimated that by 2027, the SADC region will have processed an estimated 500 million tonnes of traffic through its East, West and Southern seaboards (Royeppen, 2015). Consequently, SADC's maritime priorities are focused on security centric issues of piracy, crime, illegal fishing, trafficking and exploitation of minerals and resources. It further focuses on securing the West Coast of Southern Africa, protection of Southern Africa's rivers and lakes, military defence intelligence gathering (Royeppen, 2015).

In this regard, out of self-interest and preservation of its own maritime economic interests, South Africa has deployed its navy to counter piracy in the SADC maritime areas as the country has a maritime-independent economy and significant maritime interests which it must protect through versatile littoral maritime capability, a credible deep-ocean capability and effective maritime domain awareness. Additionally, Mozambique and South Africa have worked together from 2011 in the counter-piracy Operation Copper which was specifically developed in response to pirate activity in the Mozambique Channel until its conclusion in 2016. However, in carrying its

mandate as one of the leading countries in the African maritime domain, the over-reliance on South Africa becomes problematic regarding perceived hegemonic status of the country in the SADC region (Royeppen, 2015).

Notwithstanding, the misperceptions, South Africa has had an inescapable regional leadership role to play in conjunction with key African partners regarding matters of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post conflict reconstruction. The latter manifests itself via contributions to regional bodies such as the African Union (AU) which compliments SADC's endevours for security (maritime), democracy and good governance initiatives. In spite of, SADC's limited naval capacity and its reluctance to over-rely on South Africa, there are joint maritime interests and concerns of which the SADC must protect jointly through a versatile littoral maritime capability and through an effective maritime domain awareness. Thus, a SADC strategic regional engagement which understands the evolving nature of maritime security will lead to a more effective way to deal with emerging threats and engage with its maritime landscape as an arena of economic and sustainable development as envisioned and hoped for in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the Indo-Pacific has the potential to become a critical part of SADC and Africa's engagements with the global community in advancing all key issues in Africa's development trajectory in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans in order to cooperate in enabling Africa's peace, security, economic and social development.

Advancing South-South Cooperation

The changing global distribution of power from the West to the East has deepened the existing divisions amongst the world's leading nations thereby complicating the management of the Indo-Pacific maritime commons. As South-South Cooperation (SSC) is a synergy of endevours aimed at comprehensive development and reshaping of the power dynamic in the global community, the countries of the Indian and the Pacific Oceans have been integral in Africa's and South Africa's development. In addition to South Africa's commitment to the global South, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean has brought developing South countries into direct interaction with one another. However, with regards to South-South Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region and the Indo-Pacific in particular, any future regional architecture should cooperate and partner with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The multilateral and South-South Cooperation approaches are best-placed to deal with the growing geo-political competition in the region.

Additionally, Africa as an integral part of the global South is still without a stated vision and position regarding the Indo-Pacific and a further limited vision regarding the Indian Ocean Region. As a result, it would be sensible for global South countries (African countries included) to favour multilateral approaches through developing countries affiliation with regional bodies of the global South namely such as in the case of South Africa, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum and Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS)

Forum amongst many others. This approach would ensure that developing countries would be able to flag new developments of concern. During the 17th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of IORA in Durban in 2017, it was noted that most global powers with Indo-Pacific relevant strategies wanted to increase their engagement in the Pacific Ocean in addition to wanting to ensure control over critical chokepoints located far from their neighbourhoods such in the Indian Ocean Region in order to protect their supplies and trade (Mishra, 2021). This has the opposite effect of undermining peace, stability and development in this particular region. IORA has come out and made a proposal for its region to be declared as a zone of peace and it is hoped that this would curtail militarization by extra-regional countries seeking to expand their presence in regions not forming their immediate neighbourhood. At the first Summit of IORA held in March 2017 in Jakarta to mark the 20th anniversary of the founding of IORA, the Jakarta Concord recalled the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 2832 of 1971 declaring the Indian Ocean as a region of peace, security and development. For South Africa this resolution should also underpin the Indo-Pacific as a region of peace, security, cooperation and development.

Promoting mutually beneficial relations with the global North

South Africa's strong and vibrant relation with the global North since the dawn of democracy in 1994 has underlined South Africa's balanced approach in its bilateral relations with the world. The Indo-Pacific is driven by a number of key and strategic countries from the Indian and Pacific region as well as those that are not of the region all of whom have a strategic interest and role in shaping the Indo-Pacific. South Africa's strong bilateral relations with these countries from the global North is seen as an opportunity to engage robustly in shaping the vision of the Indo-Pacific as a region focussed on peace and security, mutually beneficial economic partnerships and opportunities derived from the ocean and seas for the benefit of its peoples. A number of these countries including the EU and the major economies, the UK as well as the USA have a deep and vibrant engagement with the Indo-Pacific. South Africa given its good relation with all the developed countries of the region can advance the vision of the Indo Pacific as a zone of peace, development and cooperation as well as address major issues of power rivalries. Furthermore, South Africa's membership of the G20 as the only African country in the G20 provides an opportunity to engage both the global North and South in articulating and shaping the Indo-Pacific as a region of shared global good.

Reforming and Strengthening a Rules-based Multilateral Global Order

Multilateralism is a strategic catalyst in pursuing global reform in favour of a fairer more equitable and a more inclusive global community. South Africa's foreign policy has traditionally placed the United Nations at the centre of the multilateral system. In collaboration with its global partners, South Africa has consistently continued to engage on reforming global economic rules through the World Bank, the

International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In 2002, South Africa hosted the World Summit on Sustainable Development where it advocated for an action-orientated outcome with a set of targets for sustainable development. These efforts culminated in the adoption of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (JPOI) which gave content to the Agenda 21, the United Nations plan on sustainable development.

In addition, discussions at the 2003 World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Cancun stalled at the point when the global South asserted its collective power, and engagements with UNCTAD have taken on greater significance as a result. South Africa's constructive role in global governance structures, as well as its position within organisations such as the AU, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the G77 and China contributed to a positive perception of South Africa's global profile. The international community entrusted South Africa with hosting and presiding over COP17/CMP7 in Durban in 2011, at a critical time in the global climate change debate. This conference resulted in the Durban Outcome, which has been hailed internationally for restoring trust in the United Nations climate-change process (DPME, 2014). Furthermore, South Africa has advocated for the reforms of the United Nations (UN) including the Security Council (UNSC) to make it more inclusive and representative of the current global order. For the Indo-Pacific to be focussed on peace, security, development and cooperation, multilateralism must be at its core in particular the United Nations Convention of the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS) should guide the conduct and interactions within the Indo-Pacific. It is important that whatever form and shape the Indo-Pacific continues to evolve into, that it is underpinned by principles of multilateralism and a rules-based Indo-Pacific reinforced by international law.

Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific is evolving at an accelerated pace and will continue to influence and shape the new emerging geo-strategic global order. It will have a direct bearing and impact on South Africa, the African continent and the world at large. It is therefore important that the various outlooks, strategies and visions that have thus far been articulated on the Indo-Pacific are synergised to find points of intersection and agreement in advancing the paradigm of peace, security, cooperation and development. The Indo-Pacific should not be seen as a political weapon to contain and marginalise but rather an inclusive approach that works for the common well-being of humanity given the vast potential it holds for the global community.

*Ambassador at Large for Asia and BRICS – Prof Anil Sooklal

*Department of International of International Relations and Cooperation

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