

Linking Maritime Security and the Blue Economy: Prospects for the Indo-Pacific

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If the 21st century is a maritime century, the Indian Ocean will be its centre stage. To fulfil the promises and prospects that the oceans hold, better international cooperation and global ocean governance will be the key. The importance of the oceans is reflected in two recent agendas expressed in the concepts of maritime security and of the blue economy. Both concepts aim at re-thinking the objectives of ocean governance. If maritime security points to the risks and perils of the sea, the blue economy captures its prospects and promises. Maritime security emphasizes the importance of protecting maritime space from diverse threats, such as inter-state disputes, piracy or other forms of transnational crime, but also the necessity to ensure good order at sea. Blue economy, in turn, emphasizes the various economic potential of ocean resources, ranging from fishing, resource extraction, to tourism. The blue economy is not only about economic growth, but also about the importance of striking a balance between growth ocean health, and sustainability. Maritime security and the blue economy go hand in hand. In this presentation I like to firstly discuss the relation of both agendas. I argue that both agendas are closely interlinked and should be seen as two sides of the same coin. Secondly, I point to the consequences for ocean governance with particular emphasis on the Western Indian Ocean, once of the two major areas of contention of the Indo-Pacific region. 2016 will be a crucial year of transition for the region. I argue that in order to achieve maritime security and blue growth, we will require better governance structures and new means of international cooperation. The present infrastructure is a good start, but more will have to be done.

Blue economy and maritime security

Both the blue economy and maritime security are recent conceptual innovations. They are creations of the past decade and they invite us to think about the oceans differently. Negatively defined maritime security is about the absence or prevention of a range of threats. This includes inter-state disputes, ocean born crime, ranging from piracy, illegal fishing to the smuggling of people, arms, narcotics and other illicit goods, terrorism, the proliferation of WMDs, threats to freedom of navigation, environmental risks, but also disasters. Maritime security is the invitation to think about the inter-linkages between these threats systematically, and to recognize that maritime security inter-sects with other agendas, to include national security, human security, marine safety, and last but not least the blue economy (see Bueger 2015). The concept of the blue economy initially referred primarily to the economic sectors of the sea. While this was traditionally resource exploitation and tourism, new technologies increasingly show the vast economic potential of the marine environment. Increasingly the blue is however also associated with the importance of environmental concerns. If we want to exploit the sea, we should do so sustainably and keep a good eye on the health of the oceans. As the Economist

Intelligence Unit has recently highlighted, there is a new wave of the industrialisation of the ocean, which goes together with “a shocking plunge in ocean health” induced by human activities. Neither in the West, nor in the Global South are currently sufficient policy frameworks in place. How are both agendas interlinked? First of all we know that environmental degradation increase insecurity. The link between illegal fishing and Somali piracy is a powerful reminder in this regard. More generally it is however also a link between the poverty and marginalization of coastal populations which breeds ocean born crime. Vice versa, we need to acknowledge that blue growth will not be possible without a sufficient degree of maritime security. Ocean resources cannot be exploited if there is a significant threat level. This does not only apply to natural resources. For instance, who wants to honeymoon in piracy-infested waters? If maritime security and the blue economy are inter-twined, then we should not ask, what comes first. It is neither maritime security first, nor blue economy first. Instead we need to embrace the nexus between both concerns. At the heart of the nexus is cooperative ocean governance, or good order at sea. Ocean governance can be broken down to four sets of activities. This is firstly coordination. One of the characteristics of the sea is that it is complex, it is cross-sectoral, it is often cross-jurisdictional, and trans-boundary. Just think about the multiple sovereignties and jurisdictions that intersect on an average containership. What is required is coordination between the multiple actors involved in national terms, in regional terms, but also in global terms. In short, we require national, regional and global fora in which the strategies, laws and action plans can be aligned. Secondly, we require an understanding of what happens at sea. Maritime domain awareness and information sharing are a key enabler for international cooperation. This gives us a picture about the activities at sea, but also what the challenges that need to be tackled actually are. Innovation in surveillance technology and threat detection systems gives us a good start. But the true challenge here is to build trust and confidence so a culture is built in which everyone actually wants to share. Thirdly, strategy and knowledge, and law, are only relevant in so far as it actually leads to action. Good law will remain meaningless if it is not enforced. Given the complexity of maritime challenges this will imply to work towards joint, inter-agency, but also inter-state law enforcement and prosecution. Finally, we need to be aware that the capacity of many states to deliver on ocean governance is weak. Hence capacity building is key. This should not be understood as a knowledge and technology transfer from the West to the South primarily. The rich countries, or international organizations do not necessarily know better. Capacity building is a dialogue and a collective learning process on how challenges can be handled better. If this are the tasks ahead. What does this mean in practice? Let me address this question by looking at the Western Indian Ocean in specific.

Ocean Governance and the Western Indian Ocean

As Robert Kaplan (2011: xiii) suggested, “the Indian Ocean region is more than just a stimulating geography. It is an idea [...] because it allows us to see the world whole, within a very new and yet very old framework”. It is an idea that combines global energy politics, maritime commerce, the importance of world navies and shows us “a multi-layered, multipolar world above and beyond the headlines” (Kaplan 2011:xiii). From a security perspective, it is two areas that have become the area of major international concern, that is, the South China Sea dispute, and the piracy high risk area in the Western Indian Ocean.

With the establishment of the High Risk Area in response to Somali piracy in 2009, de facto a new sub-region has been created, the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) is a region that stretches from Sri Lanka in the east to South Africa in West. As a result of the counter-piracy operations in the area, maritime security in the area is provided by a substantial number of naval operations. This implies, however, a quite heavy militarization of the area. All major global navies have established a significant presence in the region. We need to ask two questions. First, how can the good work of the international community attempting to ensure maritime security be continued in the region? Second, how can the naval build up in the region be controlled?

What seems certain is that the engagement of the international community as we have it today will not continue post 2016. The maritime security challenges will remain, as does the risk of a return of piracy. The region will have to get serious about its future maritime security architecture, whether the international navies leave or stay. In a recent survey of current maritime security cooperation in the region, we aimed at identifying the “building blocks” of a future security architecture for the Western Indian Ocean. We detected no less than 16 strategies, agreements and initiatives of relevance for maritime security in region. For instance, the Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC) aims at strengthening regional capacities for maritime security and to coordinate regional counter-piracy efforts; the Fish-i Africa initiative tackles the problem of illegal fishing; UNODC’s Regional Maritime Crime Forum addresses transnational illicit activities such as human and drug trafficking; and in the Indian Ocean Memorandum of Understanding for Port State Control regional states have agreed on measures to improve the safety and security of shipping in the region. Meanwhile, the African Union has started to implement Africa’s first ever maritime strategy, and also the Indian Ocean Rim Association is becoming increasingly active in maritime security. Naval and maritime security experts meet regularly at informal forums and gatherings such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the Galle Dialogue or the Seapower Africa Symposium to discuss challenges and responses.

The regional waters have, hence become subject to a growing institutional thicket. If all of the emerging institutions are promising, none of them appears fit on its own to handle the maritime challenges of the region. More than one institution will certainly be required. Yet, the relationships between the current institutions is often unclear, and diverging donor interests contribute to a further proliferation. Sometimes overlap and duplication might be beneficial, to ensure that someone does the job. Yet, the institutional landscape in the Western Indian Ocean has reached a degree of complexity which is inefficient. Too many resources are invested in building the diverse institutions and in maintaining them. The structure will not be able to deliver. Proliferation has to stop. A clear vision and strategy about how the region will manage maritime security is required. Regional ownership is paramount in this process. International assistance is required, but international actors would be misled if they think they can dictate the terms of the architecture. Their naval presence is part of the solution, but also part of the problem. Instead, they should sign up to the maritime business plan that the region provides. In drafting this plan, a number of principles will have to be considered.

Significant efforts will be required to transfer the current situation into an effective, efficient and sustainable maritime security architecture. The architecture will have to manage inter-state tensions between regional as well as international actors and it will have to strengthen a

culture of cooperation to jointly address transnational maritime security threats. Yet, it will also require formats for technical coordination, capacity building and sharing lessons learned within the region. What could be the building blocks for such an architecture?

Firstly, a high level official political forum is required to provide strategic guidance, ensure ongoing trust and confidence building and keep the international navies in check. So far, these tasks have been provided by the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). The CGPCS is an inclusive mechanism, and almost all the littorals participate. It is however primarily driven by the security concerns of the international actors and does not address issues beyond the immediate fight against pirates. Are there existing institutions in the region which could perform the required role and take over from the CGPCS? The 1971 UN Ad hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean comes to mind, as does the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The Ad hoc Committee was founded in the 1970s to act as the guardian of Indian Ocean security and drive forward the vision of an Indian Ocean Zone of Peace. Born in the cold war, the committee was primarily concerned about inter-state rivalry and nuclear proliferation, but more recently turned to discuss non-traditional security challenges, too. IORA was founded in 1997 to steer regional integration. Headquartered in Mauritius, it is primarily an economic community that is interested in trade and commerce. Yet IORA has started to discuss security as well and it is considering the development of a maritime security strategy. The IORA Secretariat has already prepared a “draft paper on maritime safety and security” that is currently being reviewed by member states for feedback and comments. The UN committee seems right for ensuring a high level dialogue and, given its origins in the cold war, would be the right forum for keeping an eye on the international naval presence. The IORA, on the other hand, seems better equipped to organize strategy on the ground and to translate plans into action. The problem however is that both deal with the wider Indian Ocean and are hence driven by too many diverging interests and agendas. It might hence be necessary to adapt these two institutions. For instance, one could establish sub-mechanisms or working groups dealing specifically with the Western Indian Ocean. Alternatively, new mechanisms would need to be designed.

Secondly, institutions will be required to handle maritime security operations, that is, the coordination of law enforcement operations, the sharing of best practices, the organization of training and capacity building, as well as information sharing and maritime domain awareness. Many of these tasks are in the hand of international actors so far. Yet, a number of regional institutions have been built that intend to perform these tasks. This includes those run under the multi-lateral counter-piracy agreement Djibouti Code of Conduct (DCoC), under the European Union's Programme to Promote Regional Maritime Security in the Eastern and Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Region (known as MASE project), or the Regional Maritime Crime Forum organized by the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC). All three initiatives are heavily dependent on donor interests. DCoC and MASE are moreover geographically limited. They focus on Eastern Africa and the Arab Peninsula and do not foresee the participation of the Eastern shore states (Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, and Iran). At present, the three projects compete with each other over becoming the central coordination mechanism for capacity building. While one would be tempted to argue that, given the weak capacities in the region, more is better than less, in the long run this is counter-productive and ineffective. The region will be better off in either betting on one of the mechanisms and reform it correspondingly (e.g. by including further actors) and needs to

consider the possibility of merging them in an appropriate way (e.g. integrating elements of DCoC and MASE). Regional initiative will be required to do so, given that donor interests limit what can be done (the EU for instance does not allow the participation of non-African states in the MASE project due to internal funding regulations). The alternative is to create a new and truly regionally owned one. This is perhaps a less favourable option, since initially it would even increase institutional proliferation.

Thirdly, a maritime security architecture requires informal coordination and strategic exchange among operatives, strategists and academics. Joint discussions and a sustained regional dialogue on maritime security are needed. This is perhaps the area where the Western Indian Ocean has to worry the least. With conference formats such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the United Arab Emirates annual counter-piracy conference and Sri Lanka's Galle Dialogue, a blossoming informal environment has emerged in the region. These formats tend to be costly, but have high symbolic value. They strengthen a culture trust, build confidence, and transnational inter-personal networks. Moreover, it is in these formats that the region will be able to start exchanging ideas and developing a strategy for its future maritime security architecture.

Towards a Western Indian Ocean Zone of Peace and Prosperity

A Western Indian Zone of Peace and Prosperity is in everyone's interest. The littorals of the region, together with international actors, will have to get serious about how a maritime security architecture can be build. Piracy off the coast of Somalia is repressed at present, but the levels of maritime insecurity in the regions territorial waters and high sea remains high. The risk of piracy persists, illegal fishing and trafficking have proliferated, and the continued naval build-up could create new security problems in the future. As the counter-piracy missions come to an end, maritime security must not slip-off the regional agenda. The Western Indian Ocean is at an important crossroad. A stable maritime domain is crucial to secure world trade, to harness the development potentials of the blue economy and to protect local livelihoods. The region needs a new security architecture to guarantee peace and security post-2016. The thicket of maritime security institutions that is developed in the region since 2008 provides some building blocks. Yet, it is overly complex and often driven by international actors, rather than regionally owned. Regional actors will have to get into the driver's seat and start developing their own regional vision, and develop a strategic plan how to transfer the current landscape into an efficient, effective and sustainable infrastructure. Functional mechanism for political and operational coordination, as well as informal dialogue forums to facilitate joint discussions and an exchange of ideas are required. Maritime security has built momentum. A Western Indian Ocean Zone of Peace and Prosperity is perhaps closer in reach than it will ever be. It is up for the region in dialogue with its international partners to make it happen.