



# Third International Workshop on maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea, 5-6 September 2024



Stellenbosch  
UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT

forward together  
sonke siya phambili  
saam vorentoe

## Maritime diplomacy to promote Southern Africa's maritime security

Prof Francois Vreij

Stellenbosch University

Protea Hotel, Stellenbosch  
6 September 2024

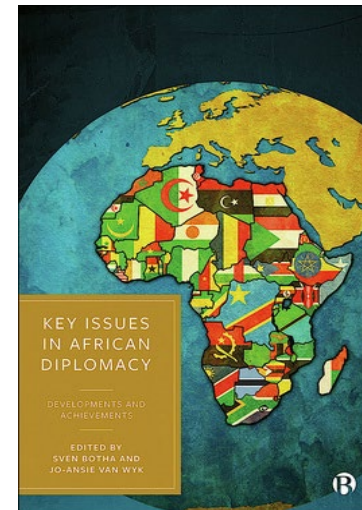


Photo by Stefan Els



## Scope

- Background
- On maritime diplomacy
- Operating domains
- The utility of maritime diplomacy
- Modes of maritime diplomacy
- Maritime diplomacy and Africa
- Maritime diplomacy and Southern Africa
- Summary



# Background: On African diplomacy



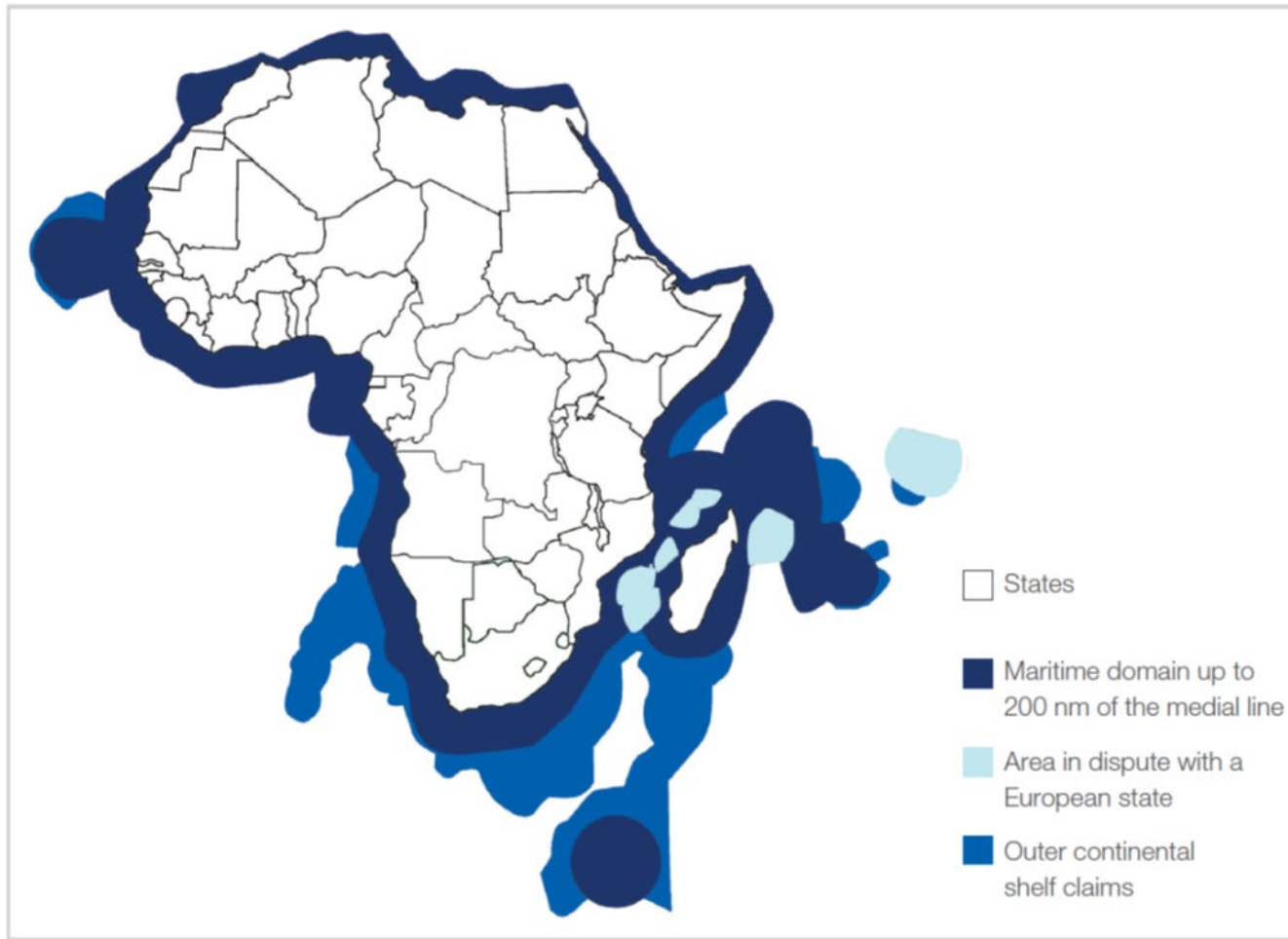
Stellenbosch  
UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT

forward together  
sonke siya phambili  
saam vorentoe

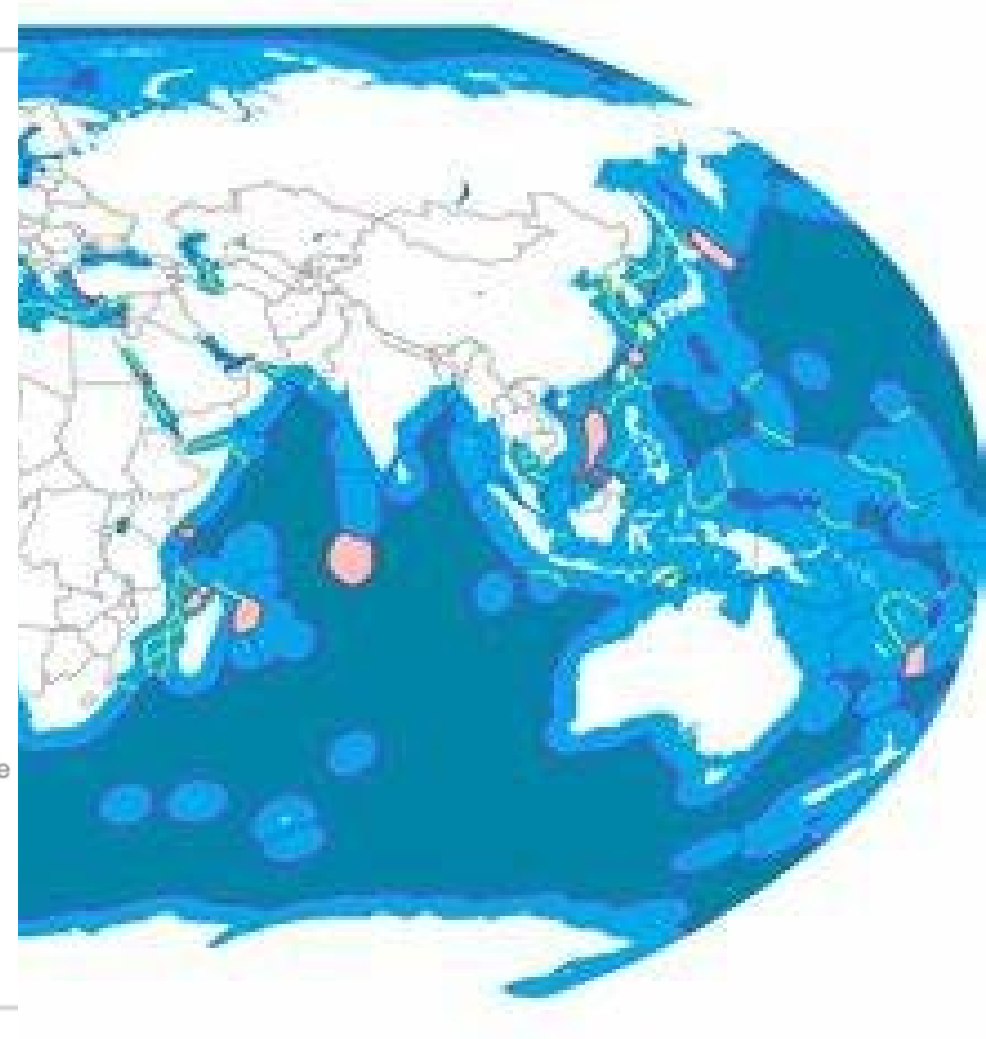
- Communication & information gathering (Generic function)
- Gain & project status & influence (African agency)
- To order state behaviour & practices through legal and formal conventions (Compliance)
- Mechanism for conflict prevention and resolution (Counter conflict escalation)
- Directs states towards common purpose, accepted & unaccepted norms of behaviour
- Injects diversity & innovation into the worlds of diplomacy to offset weaknesses

# Global oceans landscapes: Maritime zones

Figure 2: Africa's maritime domain

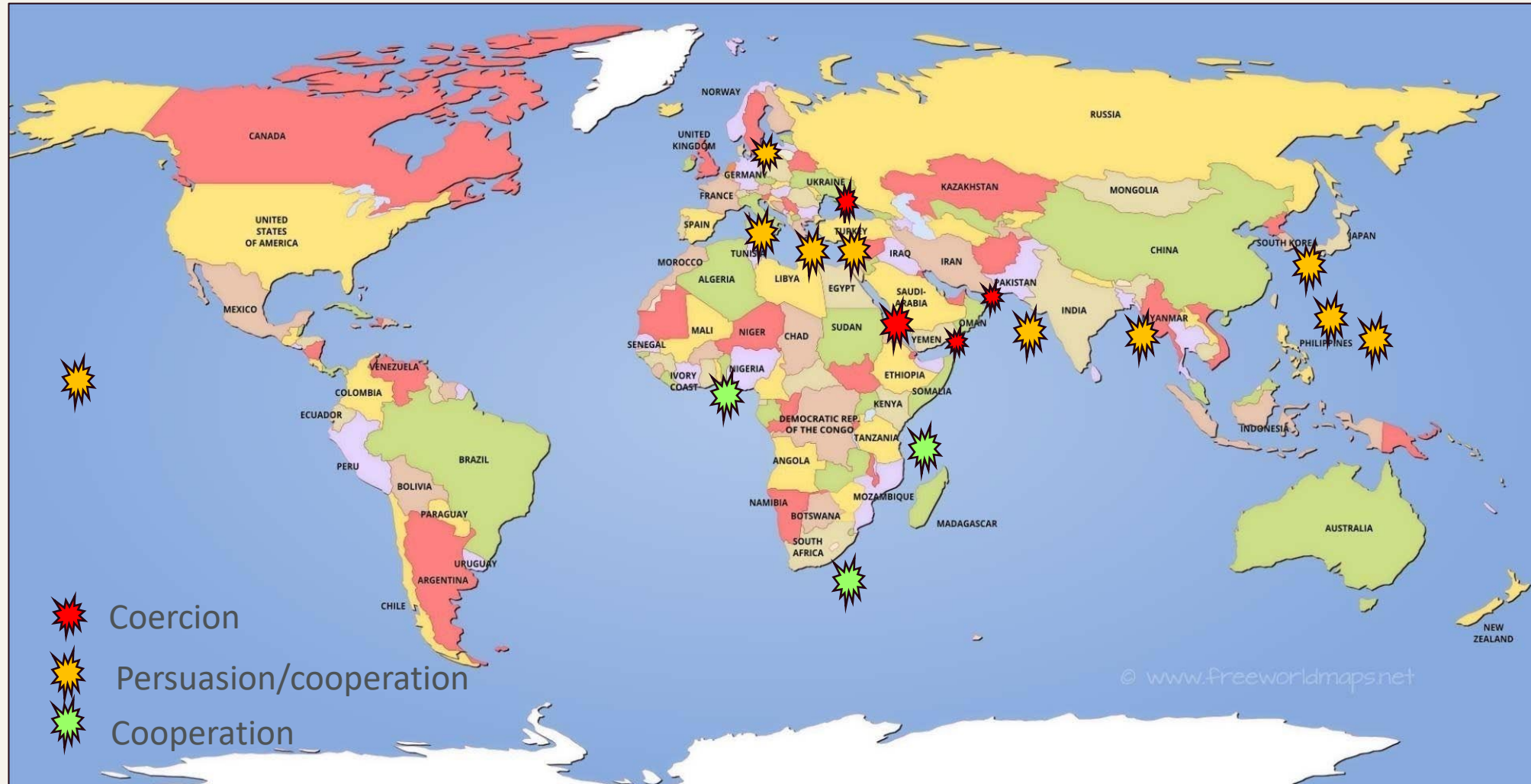


Source: Vrancken and Tsamenyi, 2017<sup>13</sup>

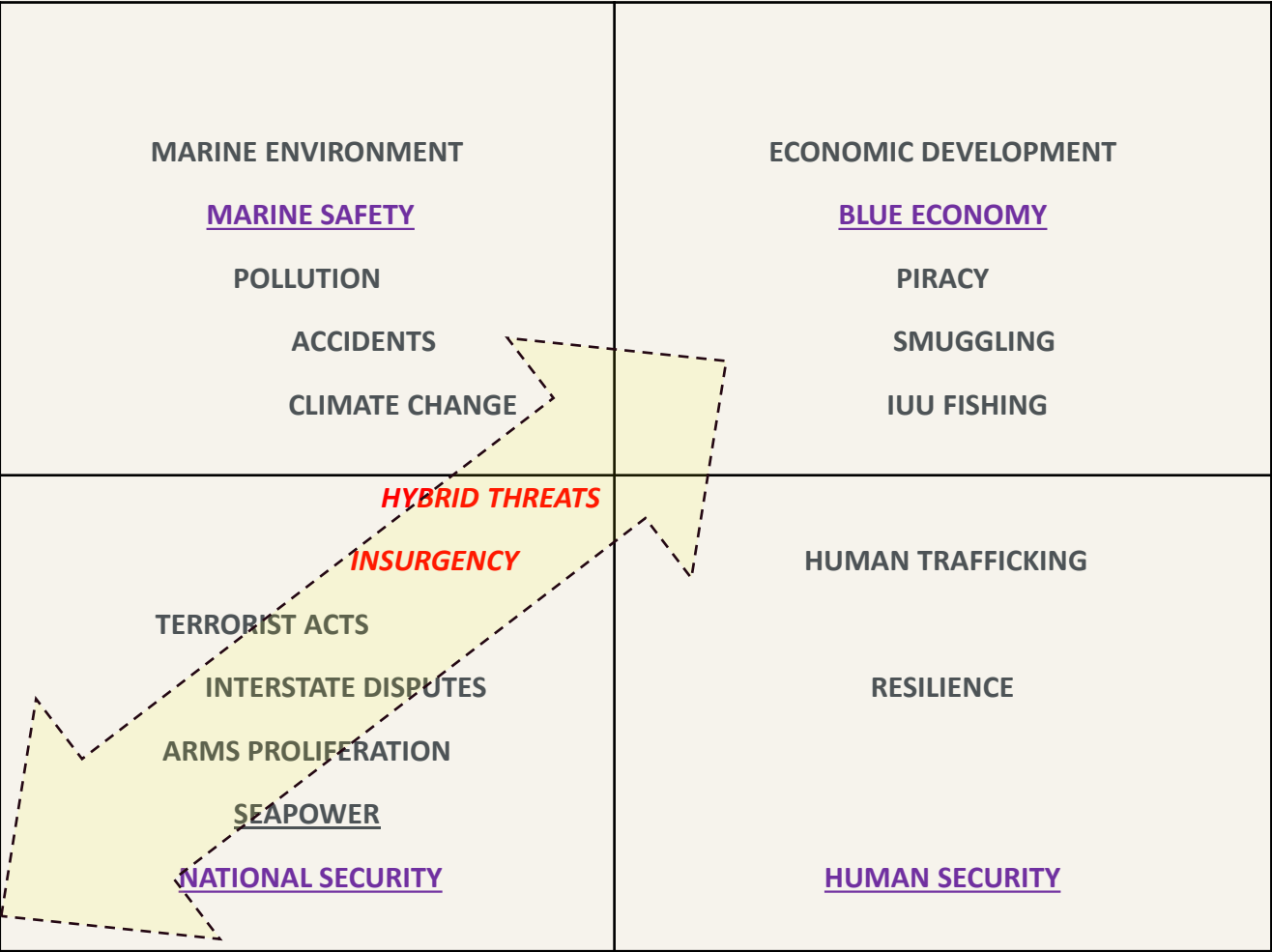


Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) | The Geography  
of Transport Systems ([transportgeography.org](http://transportgeography.org))

# Naval & Maritime Exercises: A shift to warfighting readiness?



# Operating domains for maritime diplomacy



<div><i>Maritime security</i></div> <div>Oceans as a space of insecurity and threat</div>	<div><i>Blue economy</i></div> <div>Surge in economic activities and oceans use</div>
<div><i>Ocean Health</i></div> <div>A domain of nature</div> <div>Human-ocean interdependence</div>	<div><i>Blue justice</i></div> <div>Tensions</div> <div>Ownership access &amp; stewardship</div>

[Compiled from from: Bueger, Edmunds & Ryan 2019 ; Bueger & Mallin (2023)]



# On modes of diplomacy: Ordering the landscape



Diplomacy	Hard & soft diplomacy	Smart diplomacy	Defence diplomacy	Maritime diplomacy
<p>Communication between states to conduct complex relations</p> <p>Influenced by changes in the international system</p> <p>Actor and issue proliferation drive shifts in diplomatic focus and practices</p>	<p>The skill to employ non- coercive and threatening elements of policy</p> <p>Move with changes in the utility of diplomacy in a changing actor/issue environment</p>	<p>Responding to complexities</p> <p>Employing scarce skills to address new/arising or previously neglected domains in the diplomatic ambit</p> <p>Account for proliferation of maritime interests</p>	<p>Strengthening overall diplomacy in pursuit of foreign policy objectives</p> <p>Maritime and naval diplomacy</p>	<p>Managing international relations through the maritime domain.</p> <p>Coercive, persuasive and cooperative maritime diplomacy ways and means.</p> <p>Includes - not dominated by naval diplomacy</p>

# On the utility of maritime diplomacy

Management of the maritime domain through coercive, persuasive and cooperative practices.

Scope to bring maritime security into step with smart and soft diplomacy to address the expanding maritime agenda of interests, good governance, actor proliferation and security.

- Peacetime utility for smart and soft diplomacy to lower the propensity for **conflict and hard naval diplomacy**
- Operates in and expands the space where restrictions on coercion/mil force **limit a turn to naval coercion**
- Covers maritime threats and vulnerabilities with influence and interventions for prevention **not available to naval diplomacy**
- A shift to **coercive or persuasive diplomacy with navies as lead actors shrinks the space** for softer, smarter and cooperative maritime diplomacy.



# Africa and maritime diplomacy: The drive for conflict prevention through cooperation

- Opaque / neglected diplomatic practice of African littoral governments
  - Catalysts for Africa to turn to maritime diplomacy
    - Gulf of Guinea, Horn of Africa, Red Sea, Gulf of Sirte & Mozambique Channel
    - Blue economy, blue justice, environmental risk and sustainability
    - To influence the global maritime governance and change agendas
- 
- Limited naval means accentuates persuasion and cooperation
  - Prevalence of non-traditional threats limits space for naval coercion
  - Need for de facto coast guard capabilities: Fully fledged or hybrid
  - Spirit of the AU & AIMS-2025: Continental, regional and international cooperation
- 
- Cooperation - AIMS-2050, Yaoundé & Djibouti Codes of Conduct ; Lomé Charter
  - Coercion - Nigeria naval support to ECOMOC forces
  - Coercion - Kenyan Navy support to forces fighting al Shabaab and occupying Kismayo
  - Suasion - Egyptian Navy actions to counter Turkish navy in the Mediterranean

# Maritime diplomacy towards Africa

- Naval exercises: Eritrea & Russia ; Tanzania, Mozambique & PR China  
Obangame Express 2024 (Gulf of Guinea)
- Naval acquisitions: West Africa & North Africa
- [Hybrid] visits by naval task forces: Italy & Turkey, China, Iran, Russia
- Bases for naval forces: Djibouti, Sudan, Equatorial Guinea
- Capacity building programmes: Naval support & training

- Visits by hospital ships: Peace Ark from China
- Energy diplomacy: KARPOWER presence
- Tech diplomacy: Subsea cables networks
- Port development: DP World, Chinese port development
- Turkey in Somalia: Protect living marine resources
- Capacity building programmes: State & non-state programmes: EU & UNODC in Mozambique & Brazilian support to Namibia

# Maritime diplomacy and Southern Africa



Stellenbosch  
UNIVERSITY  
IYUNIVESITHI  
UNIVERSITEIT

forward together  
sonke siya phambili  
saam vorentoe

## Why? (Scope)

- Lead states in Africa: RSA & Angola
- Six landlocked states
- Limited physical means for naval/coercive diplomacy
- Protecting the Cape Sea Route
- Operating in a regional, continental and international regulatory context
- Membership UN, AU, BRICS+ ; IORA ; DCoC ; YCoC ; IMO ; AIMS-2050
- Signatory to International Conventions & Protocols (31/24 July 2024)

## How? (Means)

- Persuasion and cooperation
- Conferences & symposia: Messaging
- Regional expression of AIMS-2050 and skills for cooperative maritime diplomacy
- Standing Maritime Committee of SADC
- Search and Rescue
- EX MOSI ; IBSAMAR ; GOOD HOPE ; OXIDE
- OP COPPER - Anti-Piracy (Trilateral)
- Naval support to SAMIM



# Concluding remarks

- Maritime diplomacy to cover interests below the coercive level of navies
- Accommodate actor proliferation and expanding maritime security sectors
- Support to the expanding oceans debate below coercion/warfare
- For Africa: Aligning maritime diplomacy with Africa's maritime and developmental agenda based on cooperation
- Small navies limit coercive maritime diplomacy unless optimising cooperation
- Informed by Africa's continental and regional agendas that prioritise cooperation
- From declarations to actions informed by smart/soft maritime diplomatic initiatives prioritizing cooperation.

# QUESTIONS



Maritime diplomacy remains an underutilized yet crucial element of modern diplomacy, necessitating an evolution to address its multifaceted dimensions. Maritime diplomacy builds on soft, smart, and defense diplomacy, and must also account for forum, technology, and cyber diplomacy practices. Although not a new concept, maritime diplomacy is vital for shaping maritime security agendas at state, regional, and international levels. It encompasses cooperative, suasive, and coercive methods to advance an actor's maritime interests. For Africa, maritime diplomacy holds particular significance due to the continent's preference for collaboration to safeguard maritime interests. African littoral states, often limited in naval and coercive capabilities, can substantially benefit from cooperative maritime diplomacy, leveraging opportunities to communicate and promote their maritime concerns and shape maritime agendas. Africa engages in maritime diplomacy through collaborative initiatives, including naval exercises, energy partnerships, medical support, and capacity-building efforts. Collaboration with the International Maritime Organization (IMO) further underscores Africa's commitment to enhancing maritime security governance. The AIMS-2050 framework emphasizes the importance of regional participation in maritime security initiatives. In the Southern African Development Community (SADC), this involvement manifests through naval exercises, regional peace missions, adherence to maritime codes of conduct, and hosting maritime meetings. Despite these efforts, maritime diplomacy is often underplayed by African actors and SADC is guilty of this oversight. For Southern Africa, particularly South Africa—a leading African nation with a significant economy, BRICS membership, and strategic position on the Cape Sea Route—enhanced maritime diplomatic skills and conduct have become imperative for advancing national, regional and continental maritime interests.