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# UNDER- ESTIMATED INDO-PACIFIC

Africa, Europe and developments in the Indo-Pacific:  
An overview of threats and opportunities

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ANALYSIS

# Imprint

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# 1. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region (IP) comprises a vast ocean landscape that evolved as a named region after speech acts in 2007 in diplomatic interactions between India and Japan. It was eventually embraced as a region by countries bordering this ocean zone.<sup>1</sup> Pending a formal demarcation of the IP, as depicted in **Map 1**, it is safe to postulate that the governments of the numerous and diverse littoral countries and island states making up the region do not all share the same views on, understanding of and commitments to this emerging region in world affairs. Subsequently, diverse politics, policies and strategies

have unfolded as part of patterns of competition, cooperation and coexistence with extra-regional actors from Europe, for example, and these have also informed and shaped debates. Dominated by the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the IP holds much meaning when viewed through the lens of the sea as a global stock-and-flow resource underpinning connectivity, trade, ideas, power and future prosperity. As a result, the outlooks of IP littoral countries, alongside the interests of more distant actors such as those in Europe, on what transpires in this geographic space, cover a range of interests with strong maritime undertones.

<sup>1</sup> Abe, S. "Confluence of the Two Seas". Speech by HE Mr Shinzo Abe, Prime Minister of Japan at the Parliament of the Republic of India. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. 22 August 2007. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pm0708/speech-2.html>, Accessed on 28 March 2022.

**Map 1 | A broad geographic depiction of the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup>**



Source: Gaba, E. – Wikipedia Commons

The research aims to point out Africa's initial neglect in the overall IP debate and to suggest how the western Indian Ocean (WIO) and East African littoral and island states feature as relevant players and possible partners of European countries. The analysis unfolds along three broad themes. The first is a description of the rise and demarcation of the IP as a geopolitical entity that grew rapidly in global importance, although it initially marginalised Africa, and then increasingly notes Africa's relevance at the IP's western perimeter. The second section

presents a perspective on the IP from African countries and island states bordering the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) to show their awareness of, or intransigence towards, developments in the IP. Section three builds upon section two and maps out the like-mindedness and strategic relevance of African countries bordering the WIO in relation to interests and outlooks held by the EU and the UK, sketching out areas of opportunity and cooperation.

<sup>2</sup> Chaturvedy, R. "India's Indo-Pacific Embrace – Analysis". *EurasiaReview*, 21 June 2018. Image from Gaba, E. on Wikipedia Commons. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/21062018-indias-indo-pacific-embrace-analysis/>, Accessed 25 June 2022.

## 2. Setting the scene

Much of the debate on, and responses to, the IP as a rising pivot in the international system are dominated by the rise of China.<sup>3</sup> While the IP-China nexus receives primary attention and tends to cluster around a 'contain China' outlook, actor demarcations, partnership building and cooperation in the IP as a newly conceived region initially also marginalised the WIO and the eastern littoral countries of Africa. As the IP speech acts came to be demarcated in geopolitical terms, the interests sought in Africa, for example by Asian states such as China and Japan, highlighted the mistake of not fully including Africa on the western periphery of the Indian Ocean.<sup>4</sup> Over time, visions of the region as a pivotal space became more aligned between major powers in the IP (Japan, Australia, the United States of America, China and India). Africa increasingly featured in narratives, outlooks and practical matters, albeit slowly, with growing consensus to safeguard the WIO.

It is possible to track how Africa entered the geopolitical and geostrategic landscape of the IP through speech acts, political interests, economic realities, and subsequent decisions to deploy defence assets. Such endeavours cannot leave aside important and influential European interests. While France and the United Kingdom (UK) are directly linked to the Indian Ocean through territorial possessions, it is also necessary to frame the wider European interests and actions and include the importance of Africa in the European debate on the IP.<sup>5</sup> Any pursuit of Europe's interests in the IP must take cognisance of how Africa, and particularly its eastern littoral, serves as a cog in Europe's envisaged roles and interests in the IP. More importantly, uninterrupted access to and communications with IP states and other bodies are vital for Europe to make maximum use of maritime communication lines and become a normative security provider. Access includes throughfare via the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and WIO off the eastern littoral of Africa down to Reunion, and to South Africa in the southwestern Indian Ocean. These critical maritime routes underpin the trading network of the EU as a major trading partner for countries bordering the IP. In essence, as pointed out by Rogers, the growing debate on the IP has neglected the European connection (alongside its African nexus), and that the European interest reaches beyond that of merely opposing China in the IP.<sup>6</sup>

### The IP, Europe and Africa

For the moment, Africa is not Europe's primary focus when viewing its role and interests in the IP. In contrast, Africa features explicitly in how IP powers such as China, India and Japan view their interests, and is best portrayed by their military diplomacy towards African countries in the Horn of Africa

through growing patterns of base facilities established, shared or planned.<sup>7</sup> One can also but speculate whether the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the rippling of its politico-economic and humanitarian effects into the European Union (EU) have reconfigured Africa's importance in European political, economic and strategic outlooks. Whether or not this is the case, Africa features prominently in Chinese foreign policy statements and actions, as is visible in the Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which is led by the Chinese President himself. FOCAC also is financially, as well as diplomatically, a key foreign investment conduit for several African countries. As a major and possible revisionist player on the IP landscape, China is explicitly intent upon maintaining influential economic, financial and diplomatic ties with African countries – ties rather warmly accepted by African leaders.<sup>8</sup>

China employs historical narratives on Africa to curry favour and access resources and markets, further reinforced by aid packages to solidify relations and keep Africa within the attractive and preferred 'no preconditions' ambit of Chinese relations with the continent. Of importance is how Chinese ambitions and African desires of restorative and transformative discourses link up to allow Africa and China to forge common pathways to take up their 'rightful' positions in the international order.<sup>9</sup> In spite of being globally the de facto second largest economy, China creatively merges economic and historic narratives to form a powerful diplomatic closeness between African countries and China with attractive economic and defence initiatives solidifying the solidarity cement of their diplomatic exchanges.

Several matters are at play for Europe, but two interlinked aspects are often opaque in the European approach to the evolving landscape of the IP: Where and how does Africa feature, given that China continues to prioritise and forge strong ties with African countries bordering the WIO? As for the latter, the Chinese Maritime Silk Road Initiative perhaps best depicts the Chinese politico-economic drives in the IP to keep Africa connected to Chinese foreign policy objectives by creating a consensus embedded in a win-win for all. Overall, China's decision makers now accord Africa official attention over other regions and, since 2018, this attention includes an official China-Africa Defence and Security Forum.<sup>10</sup> A second matter refers to views of African littoral and island states on the IP that could dovetail with European interests. Both the island states as well as littoral states – from South Africa, bordering the Southwestern Indian Ocean, to Eritrea and Djibouti in the north on the Gulf of Aden – are most relevant because of their geostrategic positions and politico-economic closeness and value to Europe.

<sup>3</sup> Cannon, B and Rossiter, A. "The 'Indo-Pacific': Regional Dynamics in the 21st Century's New Geopolitical Center of Gravity". *Rising Powers Quarterly* 3/2. 2018. 7–17.

<sup>4</sup> Gurjar, S. "Djibouti: The Organizing Principle of the Indo-Pacific". *Journal of Indo Pacific Affairs* 4/8 (Special Issue). 2021. 46–64.

<sup>5</sup> Rogers, J. "European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific". *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 9/1. 2013. 69–89.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>7</sup> Melvin, N. "The Foreign Military Presence in the Horn of Africa". SIPRI Background Paper. April 2019. 3–11.

<sup>8</sup> Alden, C. "Emerging Powers and Africa: From Development to Geopolitics". *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)*. 2019. 1–15.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Conteh-Morgan, E. "Militarisation and Securitisation in Africa: The Role of Sino-American Geostrategic Presence". *Insight Turkey* 21/1. 2019. 77–94.

Europe's interests in the IP unfold in different ways, evident in the following indicators. For Europe, the IP represents a multi-polar system, a maritime system, and one depicting regional and global features. These features, in turn, point to multiple states at play and events at sea being significant influencers, while their regional and global connectivity and relations imply that Europe can hardly stand detached from the region.<sup>11</sup> Upon closer scrutiny, Europe's attachment to the IP can be outlined by inferring the region's overall geopolitical and geostrategic importance and, inherent in this, the Africa connection.

If Europe aims to prevent an escalation of conflict in the IP, it should consider becoming a normative security actor in the region, but also actively support initiatives such as the Japanese-led FOIP,<sup>12</sup> and invest visibly in the PGII announced by the G7 to help developing countries in terms of infrastructure and counter the Chinese Maritime Silk Road initiatives in the region.<sup>13</sup> To this end, Europe can seek out opportunities to diversify and solidify its relations with IP actors and dovetail with its own strategic goals, particularly with African countries bordering the IO.

The IO is better demarcated, more familiar and places Africa more clearly in the IP-Europe ambit of political, economic and strategic decisions.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the IO has become more pivotal than the Atlantic and heightens the imperative to build partnerships with rim countries, which include African littoral and island states. Lastly, investments in capacity building and connectivity strategies to improve sharing of the security burden is critical. One pathway is to assist smaller or weaker countries bordering the IP to increase their own capacity sets to offset competing influences, of which the Chinese is but one, while Russia and Iran lurk on the horizon. This approach opens avenues to move beyond a 'counter China' focus to one accounting for the wider region and its actors. As regional partners bordering the IP see a role for Europe, this is an opportunity to seek convergence with European foreign policy interests to build upon and, where divergence unfolds, to formulate specific or stronger stances to oppose or ameliorate differences or weaknesses.<sup>15</sup> Europe therefore must seek and develop options for engaging with, influencing and directing events to align IP dynamics better with its own interests. In practice, Europe can hardly engage with the IP to pursue and secure its overall interests but marginalise Africa and leave the WIO marginalised.

Turning the focus to Africa, narratives on IP demarcation implicitly and explicitly account for the Africa connection. Implicitly, the inclusion of and references to the IP at times note Africa, but do not always explicitly refer to Africa and the WIO. Furthermore, Europe's trade share with Asia is large, and its oil supplies must transit the WIO, but both rest upon secure

sea lines of communication through the WIO.<sup>16</sup> Whether using the Suez Canal or sailing around the southern tip of Africa, vessels must traverse the WIO. The resultant African nexus presents a littoral landscape of several thousand kilometres, along with maritime exclusive economic zones (EEZs) covering millions of square kilometres that can hardly be deemed insignificant.<sup>17</sup>

Europe sees the ocean landscape of the IP as an exploitable economic asset, a flow and stock resource, and a medium to project power. In this pursuit, the WIO and its extensive Africa nexus lie astride Europe's IP access and are not to be treated with indifference. Furthermore, the militarisation problem in the wider WIO is escalating. Extensive naval deployments to counter piracy have morphed into naval diplomacy and opportunities for posturing by foreign navies, including those from Europe and IP states. In addition, military footholds in the Horn region (Djibouti, Somalia and Eritrea, in particular) escalate the region's militarisation profile. Simultaneously, declarations relating to the containment of non-traditional maritime security threats are mutating into a geopolitical rivalry in the WIO to keep in step with the presence of competitors from the wider IP. As a result, the WIO is a zone of international rivalry premised upon maritime security on the western fringe of the IP.<sup>18</sup>

Mitigating militarisation and competition in the WIO are in the interests of actors seeking to influence wider IP affairs. When compared with the IP transition zone further to the east, which centres on Australia, China, India and Japan as hubs of power, the WIO is probably not a priority for all. However, it is important for Europe, which must navigate this western fringe to play its desired role as a normative security provider, and in line with the imperative of maintaining maritime security and good order at sea so as to prevent a hostile gateway to its economic and strategic initiatives in the IP.<sup>19</sup> Of particular importance is the EU's IP strategy of aiming to work with partners, supporting the global agenda, promoting its economic agenda and protecting supply chains, participating in security and defence initiatives, ensuring high-quality connectivity and collaborating on research, innovation and digitalisation.<sup>20</sup> While the EU expresses a wish to work with all (like-minded partners),<sup>21</sup> it is also necessary to bring Africa into the IP and like-mindedness debate more explicitly. The sections that follow thus attend to Africa's stance, role and opportunities in more detail, with specific attention being paid to countries of the WIO.

<sup>11</sup> Mohan, G. "A European Approach to the Indo-Pacific?" Global Public Policy Institute. 2019.

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. "Special Feature: To Achieve a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'". Diplomatic Bluebook 2019. <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2019/html/chapter1/c0102.html#sf01>, Accessed on 30 June 2022.

<sup>13</sup> European Council. "G7 Leaders' Communiqué – Executive Summary". Issued 28 June 2022.

<sup>14</sup> Odgaard, L. "European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific". *Asia Policy* 14/4. 2019. 129–160.

<sup>15</sup> Mohan, *op cit.* p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Mohan, *op cit.* p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Surburn, V. "Africa's Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone Concept". *Africa Report* 32, Institute for Security Studies. 2019. 1–19.

<sup>18</sup> Bueger, C and Stockbruegger, J. "Maritime Security and the Western Indian Ocean's Militarisation Dilemma". *African Security Review* (forthcoming). 2022. 1–16.

<sup>19</sup> Council of the European Union. "Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Outcome of proceedings". Brussels. 16 April 2021.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 4–10. Of note is the congruence between the EU's strategic agenda and how the Chinese perceive their pathways for IP partnerships in their drive for a like-minded circle of friends (Chaillot Paper 174/2022, "China and the Battle of Coalitions. The Circle of Friends Versus the Indo-Pacific Strategy". European Institute for Security Studies).

<sup>21</sup> European Union. "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". European Union External Action. 19 April 2021. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-strategy-cooperation-indo-pacific-0_en), Accessed on 23 June 2022.

## 3. Bringing Africa views on the IP into the European strategic approach

### 3.1 East African littoral states: Djibouti, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa

#### Djibouti

Situated at the intersection of the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, with a deep-water port on a globally significant trade route (30 per cent of global shipping), Djibouti is one of the most strategically located countries in the world. It therefore hosts US, Japanese, French and Chinese military bases whose interests include ensuring the continued flow of trade through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, conducting naval counter-piracy operations, tackling the growing number of transnational maritime crimes by nonstate actors, and stabilising the region's weak states of Eritrea, Somalia and Yemen.<sup>22</sup>

**Conclusion:** Djibouti plays an outsized role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and is turning into a proxy turf and geopolitical chessboard for extra-regional competition.

#### Somalia

Somalia is politically unstable, and its population is vulnerable to poverty and insecurity. Environmental issues and climate change dangers are hardly addressed. The international donor community's interest in the country has receded, as has the American military presence. There is a longstanding tense relationship with Kenya, marked by a dispute over the maritime delimitation in the Indian Ocean. Somaliland has continued with efforts to gain international recognition and approached Taiwan, which drew the ire of China.<sup>23</sup> The Port of Berbera in Somaliland is an ambitious project supported by Ethiopia and DP World (Dubai Investments) – and potentially can provide competition for Djibouti.

**Conclusion:** Somalia's unstable political, socio-economic and conflict profile makes it an unattractive partner in any IP relationship. However, its geostrategic value on the Gulf of Aden is of some significance as an alternative to an overcrowded Djibouti.

#### Kenya

Kenya has steadily pivoted its national discourse towards the blue economy, driven by a need for economic growth and job creation. It is trying to position itself as a leading regional economic hub in East Africa and is seeking to attract Asian business from India, China and Singapore. It promotes its ex-

pertise in information and communications technology and financial technology in particular. However, Kenya has pressing security needs, including its ongoing embroilment in border disputes with neighbours Somalia and Tanzania.<sup>24</sup>

**Conclusion:** Kenya is an East African regional player of note. However, it lacks a national strategy on the Indo-Pacific and appears unable to find reliable IP partners.

#### Tanzania

The country has embraced the blue economy. However, its large, but untapped, oil and gas reserves offer potential energy security assurances to the region. The USA, EU, UK, China and India view this as strategically vital for their energy security, and might potentially militarise the region.<sup>25</sup> However, Tanzania will need a robust maritime governance architecture to ensure the security of its maritime domain to maximise its blue economy ambitions. Its historical legacy with and belief in the value of the Non-Aligned Movement and the quest for a demilitarised Indian Ocean 'zone of peace' might remain elusive, but provides links with important actors, such as India, who hold a similar view on the Indian Ocean.

**Conclusion:** Tanzania is strategically located, especially in terms of oil and gas, and seems receptive to partnerships to exercise influence in the IP.

#### Mozambique

Mozambique is deemed to play a vital role in the affairs of the Indo-Pacific, for two reasons. The Mozambique Channel running between Madagascar and Mozambique is a key trading route for goods transiting from the Cape of Good Hope to West Asia and beyond. The Channel carries 30 per cent of global tanker traffic. Secondly, the discovery of vast natural gas fields in the Rovuma Basin in the Mozambique Channel has focused renewed attention on Mozambique.<sup>26</sup> However, a weak security sector, limited defence assets and ongoing high-profile trials relating to corruption amongst members of the ruling class weaken the attractiveness of Mozambique as a 'vital partner'.<sup>27</sup>

**Conclusion:** Mozambique has become attractive to India, China, Japan and the US, with France and Italy investing heavily in the oil and gas sector. But it has no discernible maritime security policy, strategy or assets meant to protect and promote its national interests.

<sup>22</sup> Hirt, N. "Djibouti". In Awedoba, A, Kamski, B, Mehler, A and Sebudubudu D (eds), *Africa Yearbook Volume 17. Politics, Economy and Society South of the Sahara in 2020*. Leiden: Brill, 2021, pp 313-318.

<sup>23</sup> Abbink, J. "Somalia". *Ibid.* pp. 373-382.

<sup>24</sup> Kinyua, B. "Kenya's Role in the Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific". In Mishra, A (ed), *Reflections on the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from Africa*. New Delhi: Observer Research Foundation, 2021, pp 9-14.

<sup>25</sup> Hamad, HB. "Assessing Tanzania's role as a Key Maritime Partner in the Indo-Pacific". *Ibid.* pp 15-19.

<sup>26</sup> Sinha, N. "Situating Mozambique in the Indo-Pacific Discourse". *Ibid.* pp. 20-23

<sup>27</sup> Hanlon, J. "Mozambique". In Awedoba, A et al. op. cit. pp 497-507.

### South Africa

South Africa is strategically located, with a substantial EEZ of more than 1.5 million square km, requiring protection, governance and control. Almost 96% of its imports and exports in terms of volume are transported by sea. Although non-aligned, South-South cooperation and multilateralism inform its policy positions. South Africa's principal maritime interests are not well shaped or clearly defined – at least not publicly.<sup>28</sup>

**Conclusion:** Given domestic resource constraints, South Africa is unable to project maritime power and influence beyond the Western Indian Ocean into the Indo-Pacific. If it wants to continue to play a role as regional leader, it must undertake shrewd alliance-building diplomacy. Of importance is that the country controls the Cape Sea Route and the southern tip of Africa.

## 3.2 The African WIO SIDS: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles

The Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region is populated by four African island states (or Small Island Developing States, SIDS), namely Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles. They are all members of the African Union (AU), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA Indian Ocean Community (IOC) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Two other islands – Mayotte and Reunion – are close by, but they are French territories and therefore beholden to French foreign and security policy and strategies.

The four WIO SIDS share common development and security challenges, and two of them – Comoros and Madagascar – face long-term political instability. This means they are unable to play much of a positive role in promoting ocean governance or advancing the shared interests of the SIDS. Apart from the internal political instability of Comoros, it is embroiled in a dispute with France over the status of Mayotte.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Madagascar has a frosty relationship with France over the status of the 'Scattered Islands'.<sup>30</sup> The question of oil and gas exploration is a critical one for several East African littoral and WIO SIDS, and there is intense competition between Western and other contractors, especially from China and Russia.

Ironically, the other two neighbours – Mauritius and Seychelles – are models of democracy and development, especially in the African context. Politically stable, they exercise a form of small state diplomacy, built on four features:

- Geopolitical (or geostrategic) location, which continues to condition the diplomatic action space of small states.
- Issue-specific non-material capacity and capabilities, particularly technical expertise and knowledge con-

cerning oceans governance that can be used to advise other states or feed into international negotiations. Seychelles is known for its active promotion of the 'blue economy' and has succeeded in inserting this concept into the AU's African Integrated Maritime Strategy 2025 (2050 AIMS).

- Political culture: Seychelles is a campaign leader in the quest to raise awareness of the impact of climate change and extreme weather on SIDS and how to develop mitigation strategies to limit the damage.
- Smart strategies: By playing the role of 'pragmatic insider' rather than 'principled outsider' or 'honest broker', small states can help set the agenda, frame international issues, propose rules and norms, and provide expertise and problem-solving knowledge. Seychelles plays this role in COMESA (the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), the SADC, IOC, AU and IORA, and the SIDS networks more broadly.

The ability of SIDS – also those in the WIO – to exercise influence in terms of ocean governance and advancing national or shared regional interests is limited by administrative capacity (small staff), expertise (only a handful of experts, requiring external consultants) and interest-driven policies (which can easily be overridden by the more powerful). Finally, the structure and nature of multilateralism also impose limitations. Unlike NATO or the EU, East Africa and the WIO region are marked by weakly institutionalised relations, whether in the AU, IOC, SADC or IORA.

## 3.3 Preliminary conclusions

### East African littoral states

All the East African littoral states are concerned with illegal maritime activity: poaching, piracy, drug and human trafficking, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, violent extremism/terrorism, irregular migration, etc. They engage bilaterally (mostly with Western-oriented great powers) and multilaterally (via the AU, the East African Community (EAC), the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the SADC, IOC and IORA) in an attempt to manage these threats. IORA includes most of the countries bordering the IP. It offers its members opportunities for Track 1 and Track 2 diplomacy to engage with the 22 IORA member states and 10 dialogue partners. The mix includes a number of Indian Ocean littoral countries, three prominent EU member states (Germany France and Italy), six NATO members (Germany, Italy, France, UK, Turkey and the USA), as well as the Pacific powers China, Japan and South Korea.

Not all in this group are able to prioritise the threat of climate change (in particular adaptation and mitigation, the blue economy, reef conservation and marine biodiversity), and few have the capacity to implement disaster risk-reduction strategies relating to extreme weather, oil spills, marine pollution, search and rescue, and health risks. Such voids force them to

<sup>28</sup> Reeva, D. 2021. "Africa Must Stake its Claim in the Indo Pacific". Institute for Security Studies, 19 May 2021. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-must-stake-its-claim-in-the-indo-pacific>, Accessed on 27 June 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Massey, S. "Comoros". In Awedoba, A. et al. *op cit.* pp. 306-312.

<sup>30</sup> Marcus, R. 2021. "Madagascar". In Awedoba, A. et al. *op cit.* pp. 475-482.

work with international partners in the quest for security. Djibouti, Somalia and Mozambique do not feature high on any democracy or good governance list. They receive support from international partners and donors, despite these deficiencies, and because they occupy geostrategic locations of great importance to powerful players and/or hold attractive energy reserves. They remain relevant, but for different reasons.

Overall, South Africa, Kenya and Tanzania are the leading countries in this group.

#### The Western Indian Ocean SIDS

Members of this group are heavily invested in promoting trade and investment particularly in their tourism and maritime transport sectors. They have a direct and immediate interest in maritime security. They engage multilaterally (via the AU and its regional economic communities (RECs)) in an attempt to manage these threats. Groupings such as IORA and IOC are of dubious benefit, but offer opportunities for connectivity

with the IP region, given the extensive membership at hand. SIDS tend to follow pragmatic foreign policies and, because of capacity constraints, they work with Western and Eastern great powers as 'security providers'. As of late, they have been open to the growing influence of the Gulf states and Turkey entering the northern periphery of the WIO. Not all the WIO SIDS are known for their democratic and good governance credentials. Comoros and Madagascar are locked in internal political instability dynamics. In contrast, Mauritius and Seychelles are Africa's leading lights in terms of democracy and development and allow for more activist foreign policies and strategies relating to ocean governance, climate change and disaster preparedness. Overall, Seychelles and Mauritius are the leading countries in the SIDS group.

**Table 1 | East African littoral states: Priorities and interests in the IO/IP**

Country	Priority interests in IO/IP					
	Trade and economic development	Climate change	Good governance	Maritime security	DRR	Alliances
Djibouti				x		WO, EO
Somalia				x		WO, EO
Kenya	x		x	x		WO, RA, RIO
Tanzania	x			x		WO, EO, RA
Mozambique	x	x		x		WO, EO, RA
South Africa	x	x	x	x	x	WO, EO, RA, RIO

Note: See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the headings and abbreviations

Own Depiction

**Table 2 | Western Indian Ocean SIDS: Priorities and interests in the IO/IP**

Country	Priority interests in IO / IP					
	Trade and economic development	Climate change	Good governance	Maritime security	DRR	Alliances
Comoros	x					EO
Madagascar	x				x	EO
Mauritius	x	x	x	x	x	WO, EO, RA, RIO
Seychelles	x	x	x	x	x	WO, EO, RA, RIO

Note: See Appendix 1 for an explanation of the headings and abbreviations

Own Depiction

The above discussion outlined elements of interests of the WIO littoral states and SIDS to security and developmental sectors of the wider IO and IP regions. The section that fol-

lows demarcates and groups the affinity and strategic relevance of the same states to Europe and the EU in more detail as a comparative snapshot for cooperation.

## 4. The affinity and strategic relevance of African states to Europe

This section aims to establish where Europe can seek convergent partnerships with African countries in the IP. Methodological inspiration was taken from Van Hooft, Girardi, and Sweijis (2022),<sup>31</sup> who looked at European prospects for

relationships with countries in the IP based on affinity, that is, the sharing of political, economic, legal and other values, and strategic relevance. They conducted a mapping exercise to place countries on a spectrum of affinity and strategic relevance to Europe, but did not include African countries – further reflecting a blind spot in the European view of the IP. Using, as far as possible, the same methodological approach

<sup>31</sup> Van Hooft, P, Girardi, B and Sweijis, T. *Guarding the Maritime Commons: What Role for Europe in the Indo-Pacific*. The Hague: The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022.

**Table 3 | Mapping African IP countries' affinity for and strategic relevance to the EU**

Country	Affinity					
	Regime type/100	Security and rule of law/100	Rights/100	UNCLOS signatory	Economic openness/100	Environmental performance /100
Djibouti	Democracy – low 24	41.3	28.6	Yes	44.3	28.1
Somalia	Democracy – low 7	13.8	21.4	Yes	13.2	N/A
Kenya	Democracy – medium 48	56.3	54.3	Yes	74.3	34.7
Tanzania	Democracy – low 34	56.2	46.9	Yes	54.5	31.1
Mozambique	Democracy – medium 43	47.1	60.2	Yes	57.8	33.9
South Africa	Democracy – high 79	67.6	74.4	Yes	66.6	43.1
Comoros	Democracy – low 42	42.3	44.2	Yes	49.4	32.1
Madagascar	Democracy – medium 61	49.9	50.3	Yes	44.4	26.5
Mauritius	Democracy – high 86	79.5	72.3	Yes	78.1	45.1
Seychelles	Democracy – high 77	72.4	70.7	Yes	70	58.2

Note: See Appendix 2 for more information

and source material, or materials as closely resembling those used by Van Hooft, Girardi and Sweijs as possible, the same mapping exercise was conducted for African countries in the IP. (A detailed explanation of the concepts, indicators and data sources used can be found as Appendix A to this paper.)

**Table 3** below provides the mapping of African countries in the IP, both on the east African littoral and in the WIO, in terms of their affinity and strategic relevance to the EU. Countries are colour-coded based on their score against a particular indicator. Countries that score low are marked in pink, while a moderate score is reflected in orange and high scores are marked in turquoise. In terms of grading for those scores ref-

lected in orange, scores between 40 and 65 were considered moderate. Here, the countries' like-mindedness with Europe is made visible and the balance of this coding illustrates where opportunities for partnership lie and where clusters of similarity and difference can be found. It demonstrates themes and sectors in which there is convergence, and likewise where and at which level Europe could guide and focus its engagement as it seeks to bring Africa into its strategic considerations and programme of action in the IP.

Strategic relevance						
Economic			Political		Security	
EU trade /10	Regional integration	Natural resources	Influence	Diplomacy/22	Military power	Navy
low 10	AV	Yes low	Int Low Reg Low	2	- Minor	Token
low 9	AV	Yes low	Int Low Reg Low	1	11.8854 Minor	Coast guard
high 2	HP	Yes High Varied O&G	Int Low Reg Mod	18	1.5252 Regional	Regional power projection
medium 5	AV	Yes High O&G	Int Low Reg M-L	11	2.8437 Minor	Regional offshore coastal defence
medium 3	HP	Yes High Varied Gas	Int L Reg Mod-Lo	9	3.1746 Minor	Inshore constabulary
high 1	HP	Yes High Varied	Int M-L Reg M-H	22	0.4276 Regional	Regional power projection
low 8	AV	No low	Int Low Reg Low	1	- Minor	No navy
medium 6	LP	Yes Av Varied	Int Low Reg Low	2	4.4351 Minor	Inshore constabulary
medium 4	AV	Yes Low	Int Low Reg M-H	1	- Minor	Coast guard
low 7	AV	No Low	Int Low Reg Low	1	- Minor	Coast guard

Obvious African partners for the EU to prioritise in the IP therefore are South Africa and Kenya, while there is very little like-mindedness to be found in the cases of Djibouti and Somalia. With the countries that fall in the middle of this spectrum there is room for strategic consideration. Given the high degree of affinity with Mauritius and the Seychelles, poor performance in areas of strategic relevance to the EU on the part of these states could provide opportunities for partnership that would develop their relevance and offer the EU the benefit of geostrategic locality within the IP. Defence cooperation here could be a key prong of engagement; indeed, more focused initiatives that limit divergence may be a useful consideration.

However, it is important to note geostrategic location and the importance of this even when there is little affinity or strategic relevance with a state. This aspect has been excluded from the mapping exercise because its determination is subjective, but it must nonetheless be factored in. Djibouti offers a good example of why: its location on the Gulf of Aden, bordering vital sea lines of communication and being in proximity to volatile areas in Africa and the Middle East, has drawn several foreign powers to establish military and naval bases there, including the USA, Japan and China. Indeed, EU member states already have a presence there, with a French base that accommodates German and Spanish personnel, and Italy also operates a base there. Furthermore, India and Saudi Arabia are in negotiations to secure bases there.<sup>32</sup> As such, it would be remiss to dismiss Djibouti out of hand and, given the existing military presence of EU member states there, Djibouti must be factored into Europe's strategic calculus. There are further considerations in terms of voids in security at sea and the size of maritime territory within the IP governed by these countries. Similar comments can be made about Somalia, which also has a geostrategic location, while the governance vacuum there, alongside an inability to address security challenges effectively, may motivate cooperation. South Africa offers geostrategic location in that it straddles the important shipping route around the Cape of Good Hope.

When considering existing EU presence and embeddedness in African countries bordering the WIO, the general trend is that a strategic vision is in place, but little is happening in application to implement this vision. Most of the 27 EU member states have strategy documents pertaining to Africa, and yet most have low levels of diplomatic presence in Africa: only four countries have embassies in five or more of these African countries (these are Finland, France, Germany and Italy), while as many have no diplomatic presence there at all (Estonia, Latvia, Malta and Slovenia). For more than half of member states, no high-level visits take place with the African members of the IP, while only five member states have active defence cooperation agreements in place (Germany, France, Finland, Italy and Portugal), and tools of soft power by way of cultural activities, exchanges and the like are utilised only by Finland, France, Italy and Portugal. The clearest and most consistent engagement comes by way of overseas development assistance, with most EU member states providing aid

in one or more of these African countries. This demonstrates much opportunity but raises questions regarding practical commitment to giving life to a European strategic vision in both the IP and in Africa.

Indeed, when overlaying the strategic priorities identified in the EU's strategies for Africa and the IP, several common themes emerge, many of which present as-yet unexploited pathways for partnership. These are green transition and energy, digital partnerships and transformation, sustainable and inclusive growth, and peace, security and defence. Whilst not appearing as a priority area for partnership in the Africa strategy, many of these themes can be encapsulated broadly within ocean governance. Indeed, the maritime undertones in the outlooks of IP littoral countries and the nature of the IP as a maritime system mean a maritime approach would be a sensible one: the oceans provide a site for the development of renewable energies needed for the green transition, while many African IP states see the Blue Economy as offering the next frontier of economic growth, and security partnerships and defence cooperation already have a strong naval character.

Of course, it is worth mentioning that Brexit will have had some implications for what the picture of European engagement in African IP countries looks like. Many of these countries have historic ties to the UK – South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles and the Maldives – which no longer forms part of EU arithmetic. Britain has a strong presence and a wealth of activity in this region, and the EU will need to account for how it fills this gap in its foreign strategic outlook. The UK's post-Brexit plans will mean that it will leverage its existing relationships to renegotiate trade agreements, while maintaining its role as a security provider on the continent, especially in the Horn of Africa. How its defence partnership with France in the Horn and the IP progresses is thus a tactical consideration for the EU as it looks to opportunities and collaboration in the African IP.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the UK's membership of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization offers a point of cooperation and emphasises an overlap in security priorities that could be applied in Africa to reinforce Europe's IP strategies.

Europe will also have to remain cognisant that it will face competition as other major powers in the IP, notably China, continue to expand their footprint in Africa politically, economically and militarily. The nature of China's engagement in Africa and the history of the politics of conditionality does have bearing on how African states choose to receive this engagement. Indeed, many states have employed a foreign policy of pragmatism – this is seen explicitly in the cases of Mozambique and WIO island nations – where states have taken what they can get and been, at least initially, enamoured by the lack of requirements for policy adjustment and democratic performance by Beijing. Value-matching, while an important and obvious choice for the EU to base its partnerships on, may not be as important for African countries outside of rhetoric.

<sup>32</sup> Small Wars Journal. "Open Source Backgrounder: Djibouti, Foreign Military Bases in the Horn of Africa – Who is There? What are They Up To?". 2 March 2019. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/open-source-backgrounder-djibouti-foreign-military-bases-horn-africa-who-there-what-are>, Accessed on 19 May 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Faleg, G and Palleschi, C. *African Strategies: European and Global Approaches Towards Sub-Saharan Africa*. Chaillot Paper 158. European Union Institute for Security Studies: Paris, 2020.

As with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), African governments will pragmatically review and engage with plans that will be of benefit to themselves. In doing so, learning takes place – it is not obvious that partnerships with high levels of complexity lead to the intended outcomes. China’s investment in African infrastructure as part of its BRI has proven to be both trans-

formative and controversial.<sup>34</sup> Es ist auch nicht offensichtlich, dass die Bemühungen um eine politische Kooptierung Afrikas durch die eine oder andere Seite im Rennen um die Kontrolle des IP die erwarteten Ergebnisse bringen werden.

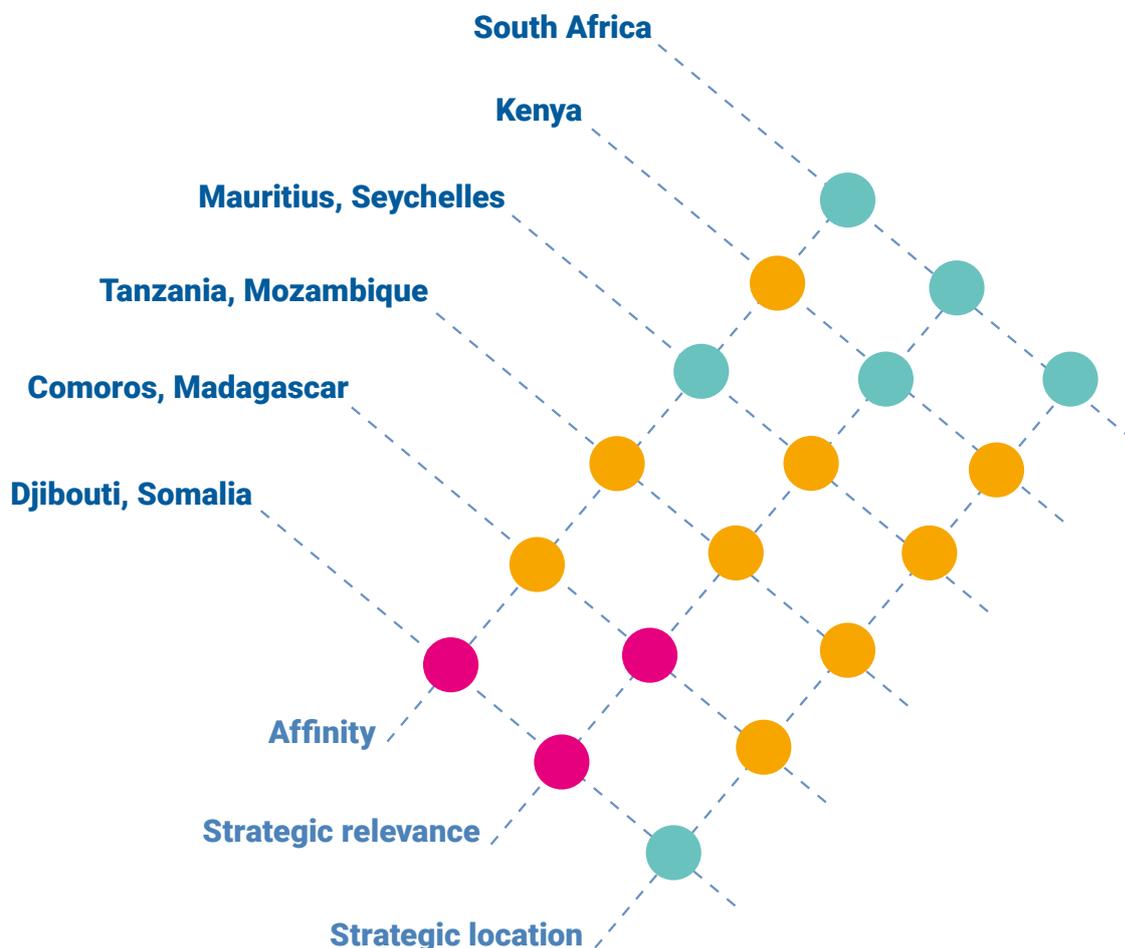
<sup>34</sup> Adeniran, A, Ekeruche, M, Onyekwena C and Obiakor, T. "Estimating the Economic Impact of Chinese BRI Investment in Africa. Special Report". South African Institute of International Affairs. 21 June 2021. <https://saiia.org.za/research/estimating-the-economic-impact-of-chinese-bri-investment-in-africa/>, Accessed on 11 July 2022.

## 5. Conclusion

As the gravity in focus moved over time from the Pacific Rim to the wider IP that covers both the Pacific and Indian Oceans, the WIO became a geographical reality, but still was marginalised in debates. In the IP realm, Africa nonetheless grew over time if one tracks how major role players like China, India, Japan, the USA, Australia and even Europe shifted and developed their views on, policies towards and eventual strategic positioning on the IP. While India, China, Japan and Indonesia, for example, more clearly emphasise Africa, Europe’s explicitness on Africa and the WIO lagged, or remained merely declaratory at most. Subsequently, and due to the ma-

ritime interests at stake in the IP, which is largely defined by its maritime character, the WIO became a more explicit zone of strategic interest for Europe, given its huge trade volumes with IP countries and contingent upon free and uninterrupted sealines of communication. Africa, the IO and the routes from and to Europe through the WIO, alongside the explicit Chinese drive into African countries bordering the WIO, situated Africa directly in the overall IP debate. Collectively, these developments acted as a catalyst for Europe to bring Africa into its growing array of IP policies and strategies and its maritime underpinnings in particular.

Graph 1 | Positioning African littoral countries and SIDS vis-à-vis Europe



In relation to Africa, where can Europe direct its partnerships? The mapping exercise in **Graph 1** summarises the heat map developed earlier and highlights South Africa, with which there is a high degree of convergence in both affinity and strategic relevance, whereas Djibouti and Somalia offer little in this respect. The latter two countries offer geostrategic benefits, with other African littoral states and SIDS in the IP landscape somewhere in the middle clustering. **Graph 1** thus accounts for and assigns value to geostrategic location. Despite having identified African partnership as a strategic priority, it by and large remains unexploited, with strategic outlook and concrete action being largely divergent. Herein then lies a great deal of opportunity, best served if taken up strategically and with cognisance of direct and indirect competition that Europe may face from other major powers active in the IP region, such as China and the BRICS grouping.

African IP states are likely to employ a pragmatic approach to their engagement, which may not be led primarily by value-based considerations but rather by *realpolitik*. The character of the involvement of external players is also a crucial consideration in this regard – partners like China are unlikely to bring conditionalities to their engagement – and, further, while resource constraints on the part of African countries bring forth a clear power dynamic, it is important that this is handled with a sense of equality, as it affects African sentiment and can otherwise be perceived as a colonial mentality. African countries are wary of the intentions of well-meaning foreigners. They are reluctant to open up to partnerships with foreigners when unsure of what their intentions are – agendas must be set mutually, and shared interests must determine the shape of the agenda. For Europe to negotiate its IP policies and strategies and include the outlooks, threats and opportunities of the African IP, the African outlook must be considered an essential element of the success or failure of having African partners as cooperative, competitive or pragmatic players in the mix.

Increasingly, African governments seem to exercise agency and voice, and the expectation is for the key players (in this case Kenya, South Africa and Mauritius) to develop coordinated foreign, trade and security approaches to the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific. This is a factor Europe might want to reflect on as it operationalises its ambitious IP agenda.

## Appendix 1: Code for Table 1

<b>Trade and economic development</b>	Economic growth, investment, tourism, trade, connectivity, maritime transport, hydrocarbons
<b>Climate change</b>	Adaptation and mitigation, blue economy, reef conservation, marine biodiversity
<b>Good governance</b>	Promotion of democracy, human rights, rule of law
<b>Maritime security</b>	Illegal maritime activity (poaching, piracy, drug and human trafficking, illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing), violent extremism/terrorism, irregular migration, etc.
<b>DRR</b>	Disaster risk reduction strategies to manage extreme weather, oil spills, marine pollution, search and rescue, health risks
<b>Alliances</b>	WO – Western-oriented: led by US and EU
	EO – Eastern-oriented: led by China
	RA – Regional Africa: AU, SADC, EAC, IGAD
	RIO – Regional IO: IOC, IORA

## Appendix 2: Concepts, indicators and data sources for mapping in Table 3

Concept		Research question	Indicator	Scoring	Data source
Affinity		Is the country democratic?	Regime type	High, medium, low, based on index score	Freedom House
		Does the country respect principles of the rule of law and judicial freedom, and provide security as a political good?	Security and the rule of law	High, medium, low, based on index score	Mo Ibrahim Index
		Is the country a champion or underminer of human rights?	Rights	High, medium, low, based on index score	Mo Ibrahim Index
		Does the country adhere to the principles of mare liberum?	UNCLOS	Party or signatory	Manual coding from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea
		Does the country support liberal economic values?	Economic openness	High, medium, low, based on index score	Mo Ibrahim Index (business environment)
		What is the country's environmental performance?	Environmental performance	High, medium, low, based on index score	Environmental Performance Index
Relevance	Economic	Is the country an important trading partner of the EU?	EU trade	High, medium, low and ranking within group	Import and export data from trading economics (volume and ranking)
		Is the country an important regional trading actor?	Regional integration	High performer, average performer, low performer	Regional African Integration Index
		Does the country possess critical natural resources?	Natural resources	Yes or no, volume, varied or not, oil and gas or not	Manual coding based on significance of natural resources present
	Political	What is the country's potential influence capacity?	Influence	High, moderate or low at both international and regional levels	Formal Bilateral Influence Capacity Index
		What is the level of the country's diplomatic representation	Diplomacy	High, medium, low, based on number of EU member states' missions in country	African strategies. European and global approaches to Sub-Saharan Africa. Chaillot Paper 158, June 2020.
	Security	Does the country have strong military coercive capabilities?	Military power	High, medium, low, based on score plus type of power	Global Firepower Index
		What type of navy does the country have?	Navy	Scored based on type – Coast Guard, Regional Power Projection, Regional Offshore Coastal Defence, Inshore Constabulary	Guarding the Maritime Commons: What role for Europe in the Indo-Pacific. The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022; The Military Balance

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