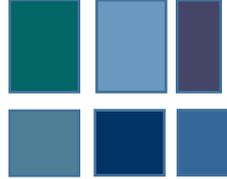




associated with  
**UNISA** |   
university  
of south africa

OCCASIONAL PAPER 84



## **Global Commons Security: An African Grand Strategy?**

## ■ ABOUT IGD

The IGD is an independent foreign policy think tank dedicated to the analysis of and dialogue on the evolving international political and economic environment, and the role of Africa and South Africa. It advances a balanced, relevant and policy-oriented analysis, debate and documentation of South Africa's role in international relations and diplomacy.

The IGD strives for a prosperous and peaceful Africa in a progressive global order through cutting edge policy research and analysis, catalytic dialogue and stakeholder interface on global dynamics that have an impact on South Africa and Africa.

3rd Floor Robert Sobukwe Building  
263 Nana Sita Street  
Pretoria South Africa

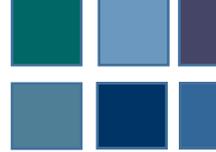
+27123376082

[info@igd.org.za](mailto:info@igd.org.za)  
[www.igd.org.za](http://www.igd.org.za)

All rights reserved. The material in this publication may not be reproduced, stored or transmitted without the prior permission of the copyright holder. Short extracts may be quoted, provided the source is acknowledged.

### **About the authors**

**Mr. Francis Kornegay** is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Global Dialogue. He is also a member of the JIOR international editorial board and a past fellow of the Woodrow Wilson International Center of Scholars. He has Masters Degrees in African Studies from Howard University and in International Public Policy from the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins. Kornegay served two stints in the US Congress as a professional staffer, among other things, developing financial sanctions legislation on South Africa. He established the Research and Evaluation Unit for the African Development Foundation, an independent US agency. In South Africa, he served as the country director of the African-American Institute (AAI) and was involved in electoral support activities. Since then, among other things, he has focused on South-South co-operation issues on which he has written and published extensively.



**Note:** The following analysis is an expansion of “SA’s role in a ‘global commons’ security order,” *Sunday Independent*, March 8, 2021.

With US President Joe Biden’s Earth Summit approaching in April, there is renewed momentum toward international coming to terms with the accelerating climate crisis which, interrelated with the coronavirus pandemic, may provide new openings for African leadership in securing its share of the Global Commons with wider strategic landscape implications. There is precious little time to waste. As Africa’s only tri-coastal maritime nation, sitting astride the Cape Sea route, it is up to South Africa to lead the way in propelling Africa toward a continental-maritime global commons security strategy in defense of its on-land and sea domains while promoting a peace and cooperation regime mediating rival extra-African geopolitical agendas. Whether Tshwane’s leaders, preoccupied as they are on so many other fronts, have the political will and vision to engage in such a complex but urgent undertaking remains to be seen. But embarking on continental-maritime developmental and security diplomacy involving the African Union and key member states like Nigeria and the Economic Community of West African States, Angola and the Economic Community of Central African states as well as Kenya, the East African Community and members in SADC, could significantly help advance Africa’s continental sovereignty at a time when it is moving forward in implementing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

### **Reviewing the 2014 DIRCO Symposium**

The thing is, Africa’s potential strategic autonomy but current vulnerability to external competitive dynamics intruding into its continental-maritime domains lies in its peninsular, almost islandic continental geography. As such, ‘Island Africa’ by its very positioning and resource endowment invites external attention as in US-China competitive strategies targeting the continent as well as that of other claimants such as Russia, Israel, the Persian Gulf monarchies and Turkey. There is also the European Union, India, Japan and Australia though, among all such actors, there exist different degrees of geopolitical motivations mixed with mutual and self-interested geoeconomic and developmental aims.

In 2014, the Policy Research and Analysis Unit of the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), in conjunction with several think tanks convened an international symposium to begin unpacking how these concerns affect South and Southern Africa amid growing interest in the ‘Blue Economy’ and maritime security issues involving Brazil and India as well as South Africa, its IBSAMAR partners in the now moribund India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) dialogue forum.



---

### Financing continental-maritime security

This predated China's Belt-Road momentum which is also maritime as well as continental. Two interrelated recommendations emerged. At the development funding level, consideration of an African "Maritime Sustainable Development Finance Vehicle" was suggested while there was limited but inconclusive discussion on outreaching to the California Maritime Development Bank and Authority as a means of learning from experience in addressing financing options and their feasibility. This symposium recommendation predated establishment of the BRICS New Development Bank for which its African Regional Center could potentially assume a role in establishing an updated continental- maritime financing facility (as could the African Development Bank) if not a stand-alone African continental-maritime bank which could be considered within implementation of the AU's Integrated Maritime Security Framework. Implementing this framework could be considered complementary to operationalizing AfCFTA within a geoeconomic context of eventual Indian Ocean convergence with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) economic community as well as with expanding north-south transatlantic trade. Hence, the broader southern hemispheric potential of an Africa-centered global commons sustainability agenda.

### **Global Zone of Peace & Cooperation System**

That said, such a continental-maritime development financing and trade calculus cannot be approached in isolation from the broader global strategic and security landscape which necessarily affects Africa's stability and development prospects. The 2014 symposium also recommended international dialogue on global oceans and maritime security governance which, updated to the even more fraught 2021 international environment, raises issues of *the kind of global context best suited to Africa's security factoring in the world as a whole*. The coronavirus pandemic, in its zoonotic origins, interlinked with global warming's threat to the biosphere portends what should be a fundamental, long overdue intellectual shift in threat perception thinking: from the traditional Great Power conflict threat paradigm to one of sustainable world peace, mandating multilateral cooperation between friends and foes alike in a democratically pluralistic multipolar order encouraging for managed competition instead of escalating geopolitical rivalries.

### Striking an Atlantic-Indian Ocean balance

Here, discussion at the symposium of the existing Afro-Latin American *Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic* (ZPCSA) illuminated how this platform, greatly in need of strengthening and shorn of its Nuclear Free Zone



origins, might serve as an adaptive multilateral point of departure for the Indian Ocean and possibly the Mediterranean as well. As a member state, South Africa (along with sister SADC member Angola and Nigeria among other African and South American states) may want to reassess its low profile in ZPCSA and afford it greater attention as a platform in need of major strengthening while considering its potential for application elsewhere. Among other things, this would balance Tshwane's predominant Indian Ocean orientation. It would also encourage interrogating how/if ZPCSA might serve as a model and/or offer lessons for overcoming the fragmented Indian Ocean organizational landscape.

Although, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) features most prominently in the expansive interregional space, it is inadequate as a comprehensive peace and cooperation platform at a time of heightened competition among world powers, with security preoccupations over 'choke points' and Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs) while, in the environmental security realm, marine and landed ecosystems in and around Madagascar, off southern Africa and the Sundaland islands of Borneo, Java and Sumatra are under constant threat along with rising sea levels throughout the ocean the Maldives among other islands. However, the Atlantic requires equal attention as does the Mediterranean.

#### Pre-emptively de-escalating great power rivalry

Cape Verde's foreign and defense minister, Rui Figueiredo, was one of the first African officials contacted by Biden's Secretary of State, Antony Blinken.<sup>1</sup> This was against the backdrop of US concern over Atlantic island access in competition with China, highlighting the importance of ZPCSA as a platform for heading off great power competitive geopolitics in the South Atlantic, at the same time, addressing chronic hotspots such as in the Gulf of Guinea. South Africa, in conjunction with other ZPCSA members might also consider proactively engaging Washington in expanding ZPCSA into a whole of transatlantic peace and cooperation vehicle. Not just the South Atlantic. With the Indian Ocean and Mediterranean in even greater need of interrogating ZPCSA-type multilateralism for, among other things, addressing Africa's continental-maritime exclusive economic zone (EEZ) perimeter, might it not be in Tshwane's interest to initiate AU discourse on *an Africa-centered international Global Commons Security Strategy* as a paradigm shift averting return to the disastrous great power geopolitics of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century at a time when the entire planet is at accelerating climate risk? Indeed, South Africa's fraught mediating efforts over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD) challenge

1. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Great-power-competition-US-boosts-Africa-diplomacy-on-land-and-sea>



---

threatening northeast Africa-Red Sea stability is but a fore taste of the resource geopolitics in need of addressing within Africa itself interrelated with external dynamics impinging on the continent.

### **A Global Commons Security Order**

From an Afrocentric 'Grand Strategy' perspective, South African leadership in addressing these challenges within the AU's integrated maritime security framework might be where to start; this is both in financing global commons security and in promoting an Africa-friendly international peace and cooperation environment. There would be need to elevate the emissions-fixated climate agenda into a more encompassing global commons conservation defence discourse. This would address international cooperation required in redressing the imbalance between man-made and natural ecosystems in protecting a global biosphere under rampant deforestation threat in Amazonia and Indonesia as well as throughout the Central African rainforest belt. It would require reinforcing implementation of the Reducing Emissions from *Deforestation and Degradation* (REDD) agreement. This should be an Earth Summit priority.

#### A 'blue-green' nonalignment paradigm?

These land-based threats, in turn, implicate the out-of-control predatory impunity of illegal trafficking in wildlife and natural resources. As such, a purely marine 'Blue Economy' fixation ignoring on-land island biomes and continental ecosystems within a broader global commons approach to climate change would be insufficient to the magnitude of sustainable development challenges. This is not counting the environmental security and maritime defence investment required. In the final reckoning, as humanity's evolutionary center and global demographic future, it should be up to Africa and its Agenda 2063 to proactively lead in redefining an international system emphasizing peace and cooperation while deescalating geopolitical competition and containment strategies.

In this regard, there is no reason why the AU could not consider joining with ASEAN, within the framework of the New Asia-Africa Strategic Partnership (NAASP), in elevating the structuring of an inclusive ZPCSA-type platform for the Indian Ocean or broader Indo-Pacific to balance and moderate tensions between the emerging QUAD alliance of US, Japan, India, Australia and China. Here, in injecting a renewed multilateral commitment to non-alignment in heading off a great power rivalries while prioritizing planetary security, South Africa seems well placed to initiate such a grand strategy discourse on an Africa-centered global order revolving around its unique continental-maritime positioning in a fast-changing international system.

