

Perceptions of Africa's Role in the Western Indo-Pacific: An Indian Perspective

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1. Introduction

For over a decade the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a new construct – an intellectual device – to interpret and comprehend the changing geopolitical dynamics in Asia and beyond. It is aptly viewed as a strategy and policy by powers within this region and outside, which assists them in identifying and safeguarding their national interests in an evolving situation. Among the diverse players there is a clear division between those states such as the Quad Powers (the US, India, Japan, and Australia) that support the concept and those states such as China and Russia that oppose it. This gives the ongoing debate on the Indo-Pacific clear ideological and political colour. Is this discussion then only about China's rise and behaviour and how it needs to be addressed, or does it relate to the larger issue of an inclusive, equitable, and multipolar order that promotes peace, security, and prosperity in all states covered by this concept, including those in Africa?

The subsidiary but vital question then is: what are the geographical contours and boundaries of the Indo-Pacific, which is more a geopolitical concept than a geographical region? Opinions among the governments concerned and academics vary on this matter, but, after years of discussions and deliberations, a viable consensus seems to have emerged that a wider definition rather than a narrower one is preferable to most advocates of the concept.

This chapter aims to examine the questions framed above and related issues from the perspective of India. In doing so it keeps in view the opinions and policy approaches of its Quad partners, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the



European Union (EU), and other key stakeholders in the Western Indo-Pacific (WIP), which comprises the eastern and southern coastal states of Africa and the island nations in the Indian Ocean region, west and south of India. In the end, it offers a set of considered policy suggestions that could enhance the role of WIP states in shaping the evolution of the Indo-Pacific, thereby deepening the multifaceted linkages between Asia and Africa and the sub-region connecting them.

2. Indo-Pacific, differing definitions

Considering that proponents of the Indo-Pacific have offered such differing definitions in the past, it is surprising that the phrase has acquired much clarity and salience, especially during the current tenure of President Joe Biden. This is evident particularly from the conclusions of the four summits of the Quad powers held between March 2021 and May 2022.

Does the word ‘Indo’ in the ‘Indo-Pacific’ stand for the Indian Ocean or India? The US government initially accepted the western boundary of the Indian Ocean as defining the Indo-Pacific, but later settled on India as the outer limit. The act of renaming the US Pacific Command as the Indo-Pacific Command closed the matter for Washington. Australia began by first excluding the South Pacific from the scope of the Indo-Pacific, but later reversed itself and adopted the US definition.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was the first to speak about ‘the convergence of Two Oceans’ (the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean), confined himself to the notion of a ‘broader Asia.’ Subsequently, Japan and the US together put forward the notion of a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific.’ Yet Tokyo remained open to including the African littorals in the Indo-Pacific in some form, given its pioneering role in forging relations with Africa through its innovative summit diplomacy that began well before China, India, and other players joined the fray.

India (2022), on the other hand, has been consistent from the beginning in interpreting the Indo-Pacific as a region stretching from the shores of Africa to the shores of the Americas, or from Kilimanjaro to California¹.

From among different definitions, Haruko (2020), a Japanese official and scholar, identified the maritime domain, India and Southeast Asia as “the three common

1 In his address, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar defined the Indo-Pacific “as a region that extends from the Eastern shores of Africa to the Western shores of America.”

geographical components” of the Indo-Pacific and asserted convincingly: “Outside the core area, the Indo-Pacific has converged eastwards and diverged westwards in the course of the adjustments that the various countries have made in the geographical scope of the concept.” She explained:

In sum, the geographical contraction of “Indo-Pacific” by the United States was an active adjustment derived from an independent policy change towards China, and the geographical expansion by the others was a passive adjustment through their policy development or change in self-awareness influenced by the other players in the “Indo-Pacific”.

3. Key issues and perceptions

Until 2008, the US-China equation in what then went by the name of the ‘Asia-Pacific’ region was stable and cordial. The change gradually began to appear with the growing economic and military power of China, which led to its assertiveness and hunger for a bigger role that could only come at the expense of US dominance. This continued in the decade that followed. A new pattern of China’s aggressive actions in the South China and East China Seas, insistence on the validity of the 9-dash line, use of intimidation and coercion in dealing with other claimant states such as Vietnam and the Philippines, in the disputes with Japan, and its rejection of the verdict by the Permanent Court of Arbitration delivered in July 2016 (Jakhar 2021), all combined to create an increasingly tense and unstable environment.

It is against this complex backdrop that countries led by the US became more united, articulate, and active in advancing the view that member-states of the region needed to uphold international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful settlement of disputes, and the avoidance of coercion and force in their dealings with each other. This was all directed at China. However, these diplomatic endeavours, backed by the periodic US Navy Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP), have had negligible effect (Larter 2020). The decades-old negotiations between China and ASEAN for an enforceable Code of Conduct remained stuck, producing nothing but disappointment and concern all around (Hoang 2020).

From 2017 onwards, US-China relations deteriorated further as the Trump Administration, after a brief honeymoon with Beijing, began implementing strong

economic measures against China. Driven by shared grievances against Beijing, the US, Japan, and Australia came closer together. So did India, despite its initial inclination to promote an inclusive Indo-Pacific. The first meeting of the Quad foreign ministers took place in September 2019. This was a significant pointer to growing geopolitical polarization. The onset of the Covid era accelerated this trend, given China's perceived role in giving birth to the pandemic. As the Biden tenure began in January 2021, the Quad solidarity increased markedly with India now even more clearly on board after having suffered a bloody border clash in the Galwan Valley (Ladakh) with the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) in June 2020. The Quad's advocacy of the Indo-Pacific, where peace, security, and congenial conditions for everyone's economic development would prevail, became strident. At the conclusion of their summit in Tokyo, the Quad leaders asserted that "the Quad is a force for good committed to bringing tangible benefits to the region," adding (The White House 2022):

In our first year of cooperation, we established the Quad's dedication to a positive and practical agenda; in our second year, we are committed to deliver on this promise, making the region more resilient for the 21st century.

China, backed by Russia, took a different position on the other side. They held the view that 'Asia-Pacific' remained the correct description of the region, rejected the Indo-Pacific as a term, and insisted that the Quad and other new formations reflected the Cold War mindset and an attempt by the US and its partners to contain China. For a while, Moscow seemed open to playing a role in the Indo-Pacific region, but its position became more closely aligned with that of Beijing, following the summit between President Xi Jinping and President Putin in February 2022. In the joint communique issued then, the two governments expressed serious concern over the formation of a trilateral strategic partnership between the US, the UK, and Australia (President of Russia 2022).

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the outbreak of the war turned the international spotlight on Europe and away from the Indo-Pacific – but only for a while. Russia's invasion raised the possibility of military action by China against Taiwan, in the South China Sea or elsewhere, which scholars feared could lead to escalated tensions and wider conflict. A new and serious flashpoint emerged in July 2022 when Nancy Pelosi, the speaker of the US House of Representatives, undertook a high-profile visit to Taiwan as part of her trip to the region. This visit was meant to convey the US

support for and solidarity with Taiwan. She insisted on sticking to her programme despite the Chinese threat of effective countermeasures and possibly the advice of the US administration to abandon the visit. President Biden let the cat out of the bag when, before the visit, he announced that the US military was not in favour of it. Although the visit took place without incident, it led China to order the most intrusive military exercises/drills and the closure of sea and air routes, amounting to a virtual blockade of the region surrounding Taiwan for a few days. The US military stayed out of the way. Mark Miley, chairman of the joint chief of staff, observed at a media briefing in Australia that the Chinese were “pushing the envelope” in terms of the international waters in the South China Sea. “We know,” he added, “that in the air and maritime domain their activity is much more assertive, much more aggressive, much more confrontational than it was say five years or 10 years or 15 years ago” (Tillett 2020).

International expert opinion was divided on whether the US or China came out as winners from the crisis created by the visit of the US Speaker. The US succeeded in arranging the high-profile visit despite Beijing’s warnings, while China undertook the most intrusive and elaborate naval drills and exercises in a long time. The region watched with alarm the marked escalation in tensions between them. Shyam Saran, former foreign secretary of India, aptly observed, “Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan is provocative and the angry reaction from China should have been expected.” Spelling out the implications of this episode for India, Saran pointed out that “China’s preoccupation with its eastern ocean flank of the Yellow Sea, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea is good for India.” Like several other experts, he emphasized the need for New Delhi to focus on expanding India’s naval capabilities (Saran 2022).

In contrast to developments in the region east of India, as captured above, the key trends in the WIP region, west and south of India, presented a different picture.

First, the island states in the Indian Ocean and the eastern and southern littoral states of Africa were largely excluded from the debate on the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. The South China Sea and Taiwan seemed far too distant to them, even though the issues at stake of freedom of navigation and overflight and the need for states to resolve disputes through peaceful means were relevant to them. Second, an overarching development in this region seemed to be the expanding economic, naval, and maritime footprint of China. This came along with the deepening of China’s economic linkages with the stakeholders in Africa under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road. Her active and extensive economic diplomacy impelled several other international partners of Africa, such as the US, India, Brazil, Turkey, and

Australia, to begin enhancing their endeavours for cooperation with Africa.

Finally, the increasing pace of the Chinese Navy to secure bases and other maritime facilities in places stretching from Djibouti to Gwadar (Pakistan) and Hambantota (Sri Lanka) to Sittwe (Myanmar) became a matter of deep concern to other powers. It was noticed that other nations like the US and France began deploying more naval assets to the region. The activism by the Indian Navy too increased considerably.

4. India's policy approach

An accurate understanding and appraisal of India's policy approach to the Indo-Pacific in general and the WIP in particular require a close look at the plethora of policy statements as well as actions by the Indian government since the Narendra Modi government began its innings in May 2014. The past eight years (2014-2022) saw the policy gain considerable clarity, especially after June 2020. Having stressed the need for an inclusive, cooperative, and consultative approach - its Plan A - New Delhi revealed the tendency to shift toward Plan B. This came following the summer of 2020 onwards, after China undertook serious border transgressions against India violating previous agreements and protocols.

Plan B involved a closer alignment with the US through the consolidation of the Quad as well as increased bilateral defense cooperation between the US and India and between Japan and India.

What has been the Plan A needs to be appreciated fully. Ideally, India stands for an inclusive, orderly, and multipolar region where all states follow international law, respect and cooperate with each other, and resolve their differences through dialogue and diplomacy. Security and development of all states, big or small, have been the key motto and guiding principles. This approach was first articulated in PM Modi's seminal speech on the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) (India 2015). This was further amplified in his address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018 (India 2018) as well as his speech at the East Asia Summit in 2019 (India 2019). Presenting an overarching view in August 2022, External Affairs Minister Jaishankar stated (India 2022):

We envisage a free, open, inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, one which is built on a rules-based international order, sustainable and transparent

infrastructure investment, freedom of navigation and over-flight, unimpeded lawful commerce, mutual respect for sovereignty, peaceful resolution of disputes, as well as equality of all nations.

The common elements in these statements include a clear acceptance of the concept of the Indo-Pacific in its widest version that is, a region that is stretched from the eastern and southern coasts of Africa to the western shores of the US. At the same time, it was also implicit that India's increased activism in the region, spread from Myanmar to the South Pacific, would be tempered by the concentration of New Delhi's primary focus on the WIP. This calibrated approach is reflected in the work of three divisions in the Ministry of External Affairs: the Indo-Pacific division handles multilateral issues at the macro level that relate to the two oceans; the Americas division deals with the Quad, besides relations with North America; and the Indian Ocean division responsible for India's bilateral relations with Sri Lanka, Maldives, and four other states: Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar, and the Comoros. In other words, India's traditional interest in the IOR has not been diluted or reduced just because it has stepped up its policy articulation, security cooperation, and diplomatic activities focused on its Act East policy, with sharply etched Indo-Pacific dimensions and a continuing emphasis on the centrality of ASEAN.

Seen from the Indian perspective, the two segments of the Indo-Pacific – western and eastern – do look qualitatively different. In the east, the central question is China's aggressive behaviour across the board. Further, the old issues such as Taiwan and North Korea are the legacies of World War II and the Cold War period, where the US and its allies, but not India, have been the primary actors. Besides ASEAN, the 10-member grouping enjoys a unique position and convening power, flowing from the elaborate institutional architecture it has been able to create in the past five decades. This makes it essential for India (and others) to take ASEAN along in managing the rising geopolitical tensions. Finally, a key characteristic of the region is the diversity of trade and economic groupings such as APEC, CPTPP, and RCEP. India is not a member of any of them. The US is a member of APEC but not of the other two groupings. In March 2022, a new economic grouping – the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) – has been established at the US initiative, which includes 14 countries: the four member-states of the Quad, seven member-states of ASEAN (thus excluding the other three, namely Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia), New Zealand, South Korea, and Fiji.

In contrast, the WIP offers a significantly different scene: no territorial disputes

in which China is a party, such as in the South China Sea; no Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula-like issues; no similar web of regional institutions as the ASEAN-driven architecture; and an accepted tendency by most stakeholders to treat West Asia as a separate entity. The only common phenomenon is China's expanding footprint, even in the WIP as well as on the African continent itself. This does involve the sharpening of the strategic contestation between the US and China and other western powers and, at a lower level, the ongoing competition between China and India for regional influence, both in the economic realm and the maritime security space. But this is nowhere near threatening an international conflict, unlike the serious situation in the east.

Indian policymakers are well aware of the unwillingness of the member states of WIP to be asked to choose a partner from among the various suitors such as the US, China, India, EU, France, and Germany. The region's preference is to seek assistance for both their security and development needs from wherever they can get it, without a manifest alignment with a particular side. Hence, India seeks to strengthen its traditional partnership with many of the island nations, such as Mauritius, the Seychelles, and Madagascar, as well as the African littorals like South Africa, Mozambique, and Kenya, among others.

New Delhi is adequately aware of the prevailing unhappiness in several African circles that the Indo-Pacific strategy of key players excludes African states, that an opportunity to cement bonds between Africa and Asia has been missed, and that the consequent marginalization of Africa is a vital issue that needs to be addressed. This unhappiness is particularly directed at key Asian members of the Global South, such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Japan. Hence, this group of Africa's Asian partners should seriously reflect on what they could do to remedy the situation.

In the above context, a close but brief look at India's African engagement and its central thrust may be relevant. New Delhi's policy to deepen and diversify the multi-dimensional cooperation with the African continent has three distinct pillars: Pan-African, regional, and bilateral. During the past 15 years beginning in 2008, considerable progress has been made in building a framework of cooperation at the continental level through the periodically held India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), where all issues – political, security, and economic – are deliberated upon and a mutually acceptable policy line is adopted at the highest political level.

The AU enjoyed a significant role in planning for the first and second editions of the IAFS in 2008 and 2011, with the Banjul formula (Bhatia 2015) as the basis of the list of African invitees, but this role seemed reduced at the third summit hosted by India

in 2015, where all 54 African countries were invited. These summits and the follow-up actions taken helped considerably strengthen India's traditional links with the continent. However, the regrettable point at the present juncture is that the fourth summit has been delayed due to COVID-19-related complications and perhaps other factors. This conference needs to be organized soon to sustain a historic initiative taken to bring the two parties – India and Africa – closer together.

The regional dimension refers to New Delhi's endeavours to study and comprehend how the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) have emerged as significant players in moulding developments and decision-making in Africa. Of the multitude of them, eight are officially recognized by the AU. India has had closer interaction with five of them: the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the East African Community (EAC), and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). But even this interaction has slowed down during the Covid period.

Then, there exists an elaborate web of bilateral relations between India and many African countries. Going by the evidence that 18 new embassies were opened by India in Africa in the past five years, the high number of VVIP visits exchanged, the plethora of agreements signed, projects implemented, and programmes on human resource development, economic and cultural cooperation executed, it is fair to stress that the Africa-India relationship is in a good place today. But it deserves constant and careful nurturing by both sides in the future.

While reinforcing the notion that more efforts are needed to strengthen the India-Africa relationship, this author observed in his recent book on this subject that the engagement and interaction between India and Africa are “multi-layered.” The three layers or dimensions are “inter-connected in the sense that bilateral and regional approaches need to fit within the broad framework of India's relationship with Africa at the continental level” (Bhatia 2022, 88).

5. Maritime security, AU and India

As the second-largest continent and the largest island in the world, Africa is endowed with 43 million km² covering one-fifth of the earth's surface. It is surrounded by three important oceans: the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and the Indian Ocean. Thirty-eight African countries are either coastal or island states. Hence, Africa's Maritime Domain

(AMD) offers rich development opportunities. Relevance here is Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy 2050 (African Union 2012). It has identified six major threats and vulnerabilities, as listed below (African Union 2012, 11):

1. Transnational organized crimes in the maritime domain (including money laundering, illegal arms and drug trafficking, piracy and armed robbery at sea, illegal oil bunkering/crude oil theft along African coasts, maritime terrorism, human trafficking, human smuggling, and asylum seekers traveling by sea);
2. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and overfishing, and environmental crimes (including deliberate shipwrecking and oil spillage as well as the dumping of toxic wastes);
3. Natural disasters, marine environmental degradation, and climate change;
4. Strategic communications systems;
5. Vulnerable legal framework; and
6. Lack of and/or poorly maintained aids to navigation, modern hydrographic surveys, up-to-date nautical charts, and
7. maritime safety information in a number of AU member-states.

Issues of maritime security and the quest for the economic development of maritime space figured in the Africa-India dialogue, especially at the third India-Africa Forum Summit. The Delhi Declaration of 2015 included a specific reference to this significant matter (India 2015a):

We note that Africa and India, besides having large landmasses, have very long coastlines and a large number of island territories. We recognize the importance of the oceans and seas to the livelihoods of our peoples and that maritime security is a prerequisite for the development of the Blue/Ocean economy. India would work to support Africa, as appropriate, in the implementation of the AU 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime (AIM) Strategy in accordance with International Maritime Law.

However, the present difficulty is that this continental-level agreement has not been converted into any specific programme of cooperative activities with India. This vital task needs to be taken up. Meanwhile, the focus has stayed on forging cooperation for maritime security at the bilateral level with select African countries, such as the island nations and a few of the coastal states. Issues concerning the Blue Economy have been largely ignored.

An additional observation about maritime security aspects may be in order here. The visit in August 2022 of the Chinese ‘spy’ ship, Yuan Wang-5, to the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota, despite India’s public protest, highlighted China’s influence, Sri Lanka’s vulnerability, and India’s inability to prevent the visit. With its 350-warship strong battle force, which is larger than the US Navy, China has become, assert experts, a ‘maritime Great Power.’ The takeaway by Arun Prakash, a former chief of naval staff in India, is telling (Prakash 2022):

Thus, until India can bolster its economic and maritime power and, perhaps, enforce its version of a “Monroe Doctrine,” it will have to live with frequent PLAN presence in the Indian Ocean.

On 2 September 2022, INS Vikrant, India’s 2nd aircraft carrier, was commissioned into the Indian Navy. This warship, the first indigenous aircraft carrier, is expected to enhance India’s capability to counter China’s growing activism in the Indian Ocean. “It enables India to become a maritime power of eminence,” stated Vice Admiral Pradeep Chauhan (retd.), director general of the National Maritime Foundation (Singh 2022a). Stressing that the commissioning of this warship is “a landmark achievement for India,” Abhijit Singh (2022), a naval expert at the Observer Research Foundation, pointed to the benefits and pivotal importance of aircraft carriers in enabling the Indian Navy to shoulder its expanding responsibilities.

6. Players in the WIP

The WIP or the Indian Ocean, east and south of India, was marked by a strong rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. This was followed by ‘the unipolar moment’ and the supremacy of the US Navy, after the disintegration of the USSR and the end of the Cold War. Since 2008, China has entered the scene, progressively strengthening its presence and expanding its haul of a naval base in Djibouti, a 99-year lease on the Hambantota Port (which it helped to build), the port/ naval base in Gwadar – a part of BRI, and a deep-sea port in Sittwe that is under construction. This success has been further reinforced by the close partnership arrangements that China has built with several island nations.

During this ongoing phase of the PLAN going places, the US Navy, though equipped with a formidable base at Diego Garcia, has kept a somewhat low profile in

the region. Its resources, energy, and attention have been devoted more to the Gulf region and the Pacific Ocean, with the goal of confronting and curbing China there. The US acts in coordination with the UK and follows the policy to encourage the Indian Navy to play a bigger role in the WIP, shouldering more responsibilities as ‘the first responder.’

In this light, Germany, the Netherlands, and the EU, which announced their Indo-Pacific strategy during the period 2020-21, have shown increased interest in the affairs of the Indo-Pacific region. But generally speaking, much of their attention seems to be devoted to the sub-regions near India and China rather than the WIP. The exception is France, which aptly projects itself as an Indo-Pacific power with a broader vision since its possessions stretch from Reunion to the South Pacific. New Delhi has articulated its readiness to work closely with the EU and its member states. A senior Indian official observed, “The much-awaited EU Strategy on the Indo-Pacific, with its Team Europe approach and a constructive agenda for the region, has also opened up several possibilities for collaboration, not just at the level of the EU but also at the bilateral level with partner countries like Germany.”

But when it comes to France, a major strategic partner, India went ahead and undertook joint military exercises such as ‘La Perouse’ (together with the other Quad partners) and also the bilateral naval exercise ‘Varuna’ with the French Navy alone; assisting France to be admitted into the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), and gaining entry into the Indian Ocean Commission as an observer, with French help. However, whether Paris fully shares New Delhi’s escalating concern over the growing activities of China’s People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) remains a matter of discussion among experts.

Great power competition in the WIP is a reality. It is likely to stay with us for a long time. An obvious but often neglected question is: where do African nations – both island countries and the littorals – stand on this subject and what do they really want? Recent research has attempted to shed fresh light on this facet. Two assessments are particularly useful in this context.

Darshana M. Baruah (2022) of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a specialist in Indian Ocean affairs, offers at least two reliable takeaways based on a dialogue of island nations of the Indo-Pacific held in September 2021. One, she pointed out that the island nations, whether located in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean, are concerned about non-traditional security threats such as climate change, illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, piracy, plastic pollution, and oil spills

as “the biggest security threats.” Two, unlike the western powers and their partners, which are worried about China’s construction of “dual-use infrastructure”, the local stakeholders/nations are found to be “sympathetic to Beijing and its interests.” She noted, “Not only do the islands recognize China’s newfound interest in their regions as an opportunity, but they also acknowledge that China’s attention has facilitated renewed focus on the region from traditional players, too” (Baruah 2022). The overall conclusion drawn was that the specific perspective of the smaller nations situated in the Indo-Pacific needs to be factored in by the Great Powers and other players in their policies towards the region.

In an edited volume, Abhishek Mishra of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF) argued that the maritime domain is “undoubtedly vital for Africa to achieve peace, security and development”; that they (i.e., African nations) are now framing appropriate policies on maritime security, but “their ability to exert agency while engaging with external powers has been limited due to capacity and resource constraints” (Mishra 2021, 5). Contributors to the volume took pains to explain the viewpoints of Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Nigeria, Djibouti, Mauritius, and the Seychelles. The publication aptly noted:

Africa’s role and place in the Indo-Pacific are neither defined nor clearly articulated. But the African countries must determine which specific agendas of the Indo-Pacific –maritime security, maritime ecology and resources, capacity building and information sharing, maritime connectivity, and disaster management—to focus on going forward.

Without doing this, “they will miss out on participating in the decision-making processes on maritime security issues” (Mishra 2021, 6).

7. Conclusion

The foregoing analysis offers a complex and evolving collage of policies, perceptions, and perspectives on Africa’s role in the WIP.

In conclusion, this author’s extensive study of the subject for the past decade and his past work experience as a diplomat in several Indo-Pacific states for nearly two decades encourage him to offer a set of five policy suggestions, as below:

- I. Relevant African governments and the AU need to update the AIM Strategy

2050 (crafted in 2012) and create a mechanism for dialogue with selected Indo-Pacific partners on the entire range of issues with a bearing on Africa's maritime domain.

- II. With India in particular, the proposed dialogue may be arranged under the auspices of the IAFS. The fourth summit, which should be convened as soon as possible, would be an ideal platform to reflect on how Africa's marginalization in policymaking relating to the Indo-Pacific can be gradually ended.
- III. The Working Group on Blue Economy, established by the IORA in 2019, should be urged to reinvigorate its activities and project its views, suggestions, and conclusions regionwide. African scholars and the media have an important role to play in this process by highlighting the potential benefits of the sustainable use of vast oceanic resources.
- IV. India's G20 presidency, which runs from December 2022 to November 2023, should be fully leveraged to fix the international spotlight on bringing Africa into the mainstream of international politics, economy, and diplomacy. An immediate and effective way is to admit the AU as a full-fledged member of this prestigious and influential multilateral grouping, often depicted as the world's premier forum for international economic cooperation.
- V. Finally, a suitable UN agency should be persuaded to host an International Conclave on the theme of 'Africa in the Indo-Pacific' to raise awareness of the vital stakes involved and to drive inclusive, equitable, and consensus-based policymaking in the future.

It is hoped that the African academic community will accord appropriate consideration to these suggestions, modify and adapt them as needed, and then recommend them for serious examination and implementation by the relevant African governments, RECs, and the AU.

In a recent address at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), Dr Sanjaya Baru, a veteran editor and scholar, observed, "The geopolitics and geo-economics of the Indian Ocean region compel the littoral and island states to work within a framework of regional development and regional security, conscious of the fact that in the post-Second World War period the Indian Ocean has not been a theatre of conflict, while the Atlantic and Pacific remain so" (Indian Council of World Affairs 2022). This assessment helps us draw the obvious conclusion that the states in the WIP region need to deepen mutual cooperation, while also seeking a broad consensus on the role of the outside powers.

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