CHAPTER FIVE

ZONES OF PEACE AND OCEAN REGIONS: THE SOUTH ATLANTIC AND INDIAN OCEAN

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INTRODUCTION

The formal foundations of ocean governance have come under growing contestation in recent years owing to a perceived generalised crisis in multilateralism. This erosion has affected not only the reliability of global mechanisms in providing comprehensive coverage and assurances, but also the effectiveness of mainstream regional venues, which have long been regarded as pillars of maritime order. Yet, as Bueger, Mendenhall and Strating (2025: 6) remind us, the composition of such regions involves much more than mere legal frameworks: it encompasses 'specific political and power dynamics, strategic cultures, patterns of practice, embedded norms and values, localised interests, and regional agreements and rules that shape their order'. Against this backdrop, we are challenged to identify alternative ideational aggregators that can sustain and shape the notion of ocean regions beyond existing institutional arrangements.

One such alternative lies in the concept of zones of peace. While these zones have generated varied interpretations within international relations scholarship, their most tangible expression has been found in regional initiatives that 'seek primarily to insulate the areas within them from militarisation and outside interferences that stop short of outright aggression' (Subedi 1996, xli). These projects, however, have often been dismissed as fleeting diplomatic experiments or ineffective rhetorical devices, with many questioning their political utility altogether (Guilhaudis 1981; Leigh-Phippard 1993; Goldblat 1997).

This chapter argues that such dismissals overlook the distinctive contributions of maritime zones of peace. These initiatives, though imperfect and therefore frequently overlooked, represent long-standing multilateral practices that 'attempt to reduce tensions and conflicts in international waters in a sensitive, crisis-ridden area of the world' (Kumar 1984: 245). Examining their constitutive features and trajectories reveals how these practices, repeatedly adopted and subscribed over time, can help reframe notions of ocean regions and anchor them to novel maritime imaginaries.

The chapter proceeds in three stages. First, it clarifies the concept of a zone of peace, distinguishing it from related frameworks and highlighting how a maritime emphasis modifies our understanding of its application in practice. Second, it examines two prominent case studies—the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic—that illustrate how zones of peace were designed and deployed with the aim of shaping regional maritime spaces. This dual analysis of their respective achievements, limitations and innovations provides enough ground to assess their ongoing relevance for the reconceptualisation of ocean regions worldwide. The conclusion then reflects on the contribution of African states to both these experiences and how this helps to understand maritime zones of peace less as utopian or failed disarmament projects and more as zones of peaceful practices whose enduring routines continue to shape the way ocean regions are politically imagined and enacted.

ZONES OF PEACE AND OCEAN REGIONS

The concept of a zone of peace has long attracted scholarly attention for its potential to explain the emergence of distinctive regional dynamics. Much of this literature has pursued two threads. One has linked zones of peace to democratic consolidation and the development of pluralistic security communities, defining them as geographical regions where states sustain peaceful relations for extended periods of time (for example, Kacowicz 1998; Miller 2005). Another has focused on their role in violent conflict, treating them as sanctuary procedures, like safe havens or humanitarian corridors, that enable negative peace and support conflict resolution (for example, Allouche and Jackson 2019; Hancock 2025).

This chapter adopts a different approach, focusing instead on the practical, regionalised manifestations of zones of peace. Across their diverse iterations, two interrelated goals recur: the insulation of regional dynamics from great power interference in a context of Cold War bipolar opposition, and the promotion

of disarmament and confidence-building measures among local actors.[25] These aims were most clearly articulated in the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace (IOZP), first advanced within the context of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1964 and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in 1971. Afterwards, the number of zones of peace quickly expanded. In that same year, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) officially declared a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality (ZOPFAN) through the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. Two years later, the NAM endorsed a similar proposal, this time for the Mediterranean, followed in 1975 by the Nepalese self-declaration over the neutrality of its own territory, a trial-balloon in 1979 from Caribbean states, and by the proposal of a Zone of Peace and Cooperation in the South Atlantic (ZOPACAS) in 1986. Further interest was displayed later on as Central America (1990), South America (2002), the Andean region (2004), and finally, the entire Latin America and the Caribbean (2014) were also proclaimed, in some form or another, zones of peace. Yet the degree of implementation and institutionalisation varied widely. For instance, only the IOZP, ZOPACAS and the South American (UNGA 2002) and Andean (UNGA 2004) initiatives received UNGA support, while the others remained confined to fleeting regional or subregional experiments.

This diversity inadvertently contributed to blurring the concept of a zone of peace, especially when compared with the parallel existence and pursuit of Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs). Initially conceived as complementary tools to the expanding international non-proliferation regime, NWFZs eventually became more clearly defined by constituting a geographically delimited region established by treaties that prohibited the development, manufacturing, possession, stationing, testing, transportation and control of nuclear weapons within the specified area.[26] Such instruments have often included mechanisms for verification and control to ensure compliance as well as protocols under which nuclear-weapon states undertake legally binding commitments (Goldblat 1997; Leigh-Phippard 1993). However, NWFZs have also been stuck between diverging interpretations: those who perceive them as necessary legal mechanisms in the form of 'political stepping-stones' towards a denuclearised world (Thakur 1998: 3); and those who deemed them 'more symbolically than materially consequential' (Clements and Ghais 1997: 164).

[25] The UNGA's first two Special Sessions on Disarmament in 1978 and 1982 directly linked zones of peace with the overall disarmament drive at the time and incited the creation of additional zones towards that same end (1978: 8, 15; 1982: Annex I, 34).

[26] The first NWFZs targeted the Antarctic (1959), outer space (1967) and the seabed (1971).

Zones of peace, by contrast, remained broader and more aspirational, yet often overlapped with nuclear disarmament purposes. As Misra noted (1977: 24), although the 'two ideas are not really mutually dependent', in practice, zones of peace have always been 'wider in content, and unambiguously included the element of the nuclear-free zone'. This led to the rather common-sense realisation that zones of peace 'imply at least some measure of denuclearization in these regions' (Goldblat 1997: 29). In some cases, such as with ZOPFAN, they even paved the way for subsequent treaty-based arrangements like the Treaty of Rarotonga.[27] Still, Lopez-Reyes (1998: 389) has argued that its main proponents never succeeded in 'converting the idea of zone of peace into theory, in converting the theory into policy, in converting a policy of zone of peace into a practice, and in refining the practice into an institutionalized *[sic]* practice'. In other words, most zones failed to progress beyond rhetorical proclamations and into actual, durable, institutionalised peace. Whether this counts as a failure of ocean regionness altogether, or simply as evidence that regionness can be built through means other than institutionalisation, remains an open question (see Chapter 1 in Part I)—one this chapter addresses by turning to the logic of practice.

In light of this, maritime zones of peace stand out as a distinct spatial sub-category worthy of consideration. Defined as encompassing 'the entire ocean space, from the subsoil of the seabed to the surface of the high seas' (Lopez-Reyes 1998: 401), they purposely extend the overall demilitarisation aims to vast maritime domains. Subedi (1996: 31-32) identifies eight key features usually found at their core: the prohibition of foreign military presence and bases; the exclusion of nuclear weapons and the upholding of any existing regional NWFZ rules; a ban on the use of warships and military aircraft for any threat or use of force against other states; the banning of nuclear testing; the ensuring of freedom of navigation and overflight of the high seas; the renouncing of aggression and the commitment to peaceful settlement of disputes; the respect for sovereignty and non-interference; and the reaffirming of the right of self-defence under the UN Charter.

This extensive and ambitious set of provisions has drawn several critiques over time. First, that maritime zones of peace lack consensual procedures for implementation, verification or follow-up. Second, that their broad geographical scope complicates delimitation and raises tensions with the principle of freedom of the seas. And third, that the obligations of neither zonal nor external states

[27] The Treaty of Rarotonga entered into force on 11 December 1986 and created the South Pacific Nuclear-Free-Zone, only the second NWFZ after the 1967 Treaty of Tlatelolco in Latin America.

have been consistently articulated (Guilhaudis 1981; Leigh-Phippard 1993; Goldblat 1997).

Yet their overarching aim has remained unabated: to transform vast ocean spaces into demilitarised, denuclearised and neutralised regions (Subedi 1996: 32). More strikingly, the durability of these initiatives—sustained across decades of declarations, reports and diplomatic meetings—suggests that their value lies not in their legal enforceability, but in their underlying practice. Unlike land-based or subregional zones, maritime zones of peace inherently scale up from specific state practices to broader ocean-wide imaginaries. They invite littoral states to conceive of themselves not merely as conduits or playgrounds for external influence, but also as custodians of a shared maritime space, whose security and governance should not be subordinated to outside powers. To put it differently, they create spaces of routine engagement, where states articulate common concerns, reaffirm restraint and generate shared meanings of maritime order. Over time, such repeated acts of diplomacy help constitute patterns of governance and identity. This chapter therefore contends that maritime zones of peace are not simply unrealised projects of demilitarisation; instead, they can turn into evolving sites where the practice of peace can become constitutive of regional interactions. The following sections examine two examples in closer detail to demonstrate such claims.

The Indian Ocean

The Cold War globalised the Indian Ocean as a theatre of strategic competition. For the US, the establishment of facilities on Diego Garcia—transformed in the 1970s into a major military hub after the forced removal of the local Chagossian population—was central to maintaining control of maritime routes and energy flows. The Soviet Union, meanwhile, pursued access arrangements in South Yemen and along the Horn of Africa, extending its naval reach into the region. The arrival of superpower fleets thus led to the realisation that 'while the imperial order was largely ousted from the land, it remained relatively intact at sea' (Buzan 1981: 194) and could undermine regional sovereignty at precisely the moment when local actors were asserting their place in international society (Bashfield 2025).

These developments prompted an effort by non-aligned states to reclaim agency of their own in the Indian Ocean, which culminated in 1971, when Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike brought to the United Nations (UN) the idea of declaring the Indian Ocean a zone of peace. Building on this

proposal, the UNGA adopted Resolution 2832 (XXVI), proclaiming the ocean as such and urging great powers to refrain from further expanding their military presence in its waters (UNGA 1971).

The IOZP rested on a set of principles that were both straightforward and ambitious. It called for the removal of foreign bases, nuclear weapons and large-scale power projection capabilities. It emphasised that the littoral and hinterland states of the Indian Ocean should have primacy in managing their own peace and security, thereby affirming a principle of regional security ownership. It also sought to insulate the ocean from Cold War entanglements, offering a collective vision rooted in the ideals defended by the NAM. Accordingly, the IOZP vied to establish a buffer area that would de-escalate geopolitical tensions, meaning it was framed less as a blanket pacification of the zonal states themselves than as a selective demilitarisation effort directed at the superpowers (Lopez-Reyes 1998: 387; Misra 1977). The final touches came with the creation in 1972 of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean via UNGA Resolution 2992(XXVII), which institutionalised a regular procedure of consultations on the state of implementation of the IOZP, thus ensuring that it would nominally remain on the agenda for years to come.

For countries in the region, the advantages of promoting this initiative were clear. For India, the IOZP provided a way of reconciling its strategic interests with its non-aligned identity. Endorsing the initiative enabled New Delhi to assert its autonomy, resist external encroachment and project itself as a leader in managing the surrounding waters (Joshi 2019). Meanwhile, smaller states such as Mauritius and Sri Lanka saw in the project a protective mechanism against superpower encroachment and a chance to amplify their voices in world politics, much as East African states saw it as an opportunity to guarantee stable trade flows amidst fragile post-independence economies and avoid major disruption of relations among neighbouring states (Copson 1977).

However, despite its normative resonance during the Cold War, the IOZP soon ran into obstacles that prevented it from evolving into an effective governance regime. For one, the great powers themselves rejected the initiative outright. Washington insisted that its naval presence was essential for safeguarding freedom of navigation, while Moscow claimed the right to maintain its own access and deployments. Regional consensus was also lacking. The diversity of interests abovementioned made it difficult to sustain a unified position in favour of demilitarisation, even as they kept pushing for the organisation of an overarching conference to settle the remaining operational details. Lastly,

the IOZP's institutional foundations were thin. General Assembly resolutions were and remain non-binding under international law, while the absence of enforcement provisions meant that the declaration remained largely aspirational. By the mid-1980s, geopolitical events in the region and in the world quickly overtook the momentum of the initiative (Kumar 1984; Buzan 1981) and the IOZP lost visibility as an active diplomatic endeavour.

However, its significance lies less in its institutional outcomes than in how it contributed to the construction of the Indian Ocean as a political region. Four innovations in that regard can be highlighted. First, the IOZP fostered an evident sense of regional identity formation. By linking the Indian Ocean to the non-alignment agenda, the initiative showcased how postcolonial states could act as norm entrepreneurs rather than passive objects of superpower politics. This was an assertion of political imagination as much as of policy: the littoral states declared that they, not outsiders, should be the shared custodians of their maritime environment. The common ground was evident: as Copson (1977: 340) noted, at this point, African states had essentially 'subscribed to the view that the interests of all—and particularly their mutual interest in development—are best served by an absence of conflict'. To be clear, the extent of the ocean was never defined; even the Ad Hoc Committee ended up stating that 'accurate definitions' of this nature were not necessary 'at the initial stages' (Misra 1977: 20). But by framing the Indian Ocean as a distinct security space, the IOZP helped shift the discourse toward a collective understanding of shared vulnerabilities and responsibilities.

Second, the IOZP was one of the very first international initiatives to call for the demilitarisation of an entire maritime space, comparable in scope and ambition only to NWFZs, which were also beginning to emerge around this same period. But at a time in which negotiations for the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) had yet to begin in earnest, it also brought to the centre stage of the debate the then-controversial principle of the use of the high seas for peaceful purposes (Subedi 1996: 7). Even if UNCLOS resulted in a trade-off by which 'coastal states accepted a relatively unconstrained right of navigation in return for the acceptance by the maritime powers of extended coastal state control over resources' (Buzan 1981: 194), the IOZP still managed to expand the conversation on how oceans could be governed, offering a template for reimagining strategic waters not as extensions of great power rivalry but as innate cooperative spaces.

Third, not only did the IOZP seek to promote the Indian Ocean as an overall demilitarised space, but it also pursued such transformation under a UNGA resolution rather than through a multilateral treaty. This option, while not the

most consequential, did nonetheless ensure constant visibility. Until 2025, a total of forty resolutions and forty reports were regularly submitted and approved by the international community.[28] This comprises evidence of an established practice that, even if it had few practical consequences, has provided a modicum of legitimacy to this initiative. The Ad Hoc Committee membership also provides a good barometer of who supports the need to continue with such regionally tailored discussions: it began with the participation of fifteen member states and even though the US, France and the UK withdrew from participating after the end of the Cold War, it was subsequently enlarged until it reached its present 43 members—fifteen of which are African states.[29]

Fourth, the IOZP helped lay the foundation for subsequent forms of regionalism. Although its security objectives were never fully realised, the aspiration for Indian Ocean solidarity carried forward into later initiatives. The creation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 1997 reflected a continuation of the IOZP's underlying premise that the surrounding ocean could be treated as a coherent region.[30] Although IORA emphasises economic and functional cooperation rather than demilitarisation, its existence owes much to the earlier discursive work of constructing the Indian Ocean as a space requiring collective management. Even the broader and more recent discussion concerning an Indo-Pacific framework, though still dominated by great power competition, continues to grapple with the same tensions between external interests and regional self-definition that fuelled the IOZP decades earlier.

The IOZP thus illustrates the ability to articulate powerful normative visions, but also the difficulty of translating them into durable outcomes under conditions of structural asymmetry. On the one hand, the initiative faltered as a practical project for demilitarisation. Three years after Resolution 2832 (XXVI), for instance, India conducted its first underground nuclear test explosion, becoming the first state in the region to do so. The fact that Diego Garcia remained unresolved throughout this period also attested to the inability to remove external footholds. On the other hand, the IOZP succeeded in embedding the Indian Ocean within global diplomatic imagination as a distinct region whose future should not be left to external powers alone. Littoral states may have remained divided by geography, political alignments and security partnerships, and the ocean may

[28] Reports were submitted annually between 1972 and 1997, after which they began to be submitted every two years. Resolutions were also submitted annually until 1992 and after 1999 they began to be submitted every two years.

[29] South Africa remains an observer since 1995 but has supported the IOZP by regularly submitting draft resolutions to the UNGA on behalf of the NAM group.

[30] For instance, the Jakarta Concord, signed during the IORA Leaders Summit that took place in Indonesia, March 2-5, 2017, explicitly recalled the IOZP experience (IORA 2017).

have continued to attract intense interest from external powers, yet the regional aspiration—first articulated through this maritime zone—continues to inform debates about what is both possible and desirable. The IOZP therefore endures as a reminder of how ideas and practices of peace can serve not only as diplomatic tools, but also as building blocks in the construction of ocean regions.

The South Atlantic

Unlike the Indian Ocean, the South Atlantic occupied a more ambiguous position during the Cold War. It was not a central stage for superpower confrontation, yet it gradually became entangled in the broader strategic rationale of bipolarity. US and Soviet naval deployments and the military use of Ascension Island and the Falkland/Malvinas Islands by NATO members heightened anxieties about the prospect of external militarisation, as the 1982 Argentine-British conflict illustrated. For states on both the African and South American littorals, this pattern evoked a familiar colonial cartography—one in which their maritime space was treated as an extension of the North Atlantic and remained closed to their own autonomous agency. The international campaign against apartheid South Africa and the spectre of nuclearisation in Pretoria further sharpened the sense that maritime peace and territorial emancipation were inseparable (Hurrell 1983).

Taken together, the abovementioned dynamics created the political momentum to reconceptualise the South Atlantic as a site for intra-regional cooperation rather than for Northern projection alone. Accordingly, in 1986, Brazil introduced the idea of ZOPACAS to the UNGA. The proposal was symbolically potent and received overwhelming support from African and South American littoral and hinterland states, but encountered opposition from countries like the US, the United Kingdom and France. Regardless, the resulting Resolution 41/11 formally proclaimed the South Atlantic a space dedicated to peace, cooperation and denuclearisation (UNGA 1986).

Overall, ZOPACAS was founded upon two interconnected propositions. The first was demilitarisation and denuclearisation, explicitly aimed at preventing the introduction or testing of nuclear weapons, at opposing foreign military bases and power projection in the region, but also at concluding the decolonisation process (Abdenur, Mattheis and Seabra 2016). This goal directly targeted South Africa, which still maintained its control over then-Southwest Africa. The second was cooperative development, encompassing joint economic, scientific and environmental initiatives designed to strengthen the autonomy and interdependence of southern Atlantic states.

The initiative's driving coalition reflected complementary, though uneven, interests. Brazil viewed ZOPACAS as a means to consolidate its maritime reach towards Africa and enhance its standing as a responsible security provider. Nigeria and Angola, both navigating Cold War pressures, saw it as a diplomatic platform for the anti-apartheid struggle. Smaller African and South American states joined to strengthen their collective bargaining capacity within the UN system (Jardim 1991). This diverse coalition produced a vision of the South Atlantic as both a zone of restraint—free from external nuclear and military impositions—and a zone of connection, binding two continents historically divided.

Despite early enthusiasm, ZOPACAS faced significant limitations. Great power resistance remained constant. NATO members, for one, argued that demilitarisation would constrain freedom of navigation and legitimate operations related to the Falkland/Malvinas Islands and Ascension Island. Indeed, the realisation that 'projects of this magnitude that do not have support from the North American country have reduced chances of survival and extremely limited reach' quickly settled in (Miyamoto 1987). Institutional fragility also persisted as the zone never acquired a secretariat, budget or decision-making authority of its own (Abdenur, Mattheis and Seabra 2016: 1124-1125). Divergent national priorities further undermined cohesion. Brazil and Argentina focused on nuclear non-proliferation and prestige diplomacy, whereas many African states viewed ZOPACAS primarily as a tool of anti-apartheid policy. The end of the Cold War, the demise of apartheid and the independence of Namibia removed much of the Zone's immediate political urgency, and subsequent regional architectures such as IBSA (India–Brazil–South Africa Dialogue Forum) and the Africa-South America (ASA) summits took up the bulk of the cooperative agenda under different banners.

Yet, the enduring importance of ZOPACAS lies not in what it failed to build, but in what it introduced to ocean practices. Four innovations can be identified in this context, each revealing how ZOPACAS contributed to the conceptualisation of the South Atlantic as a distinct ocean region rather than as a peripheral extension of the North.

First, ZOPACAS was the first multilateral framework to provide a transoceanic regional identity and define the South Atlantic as a coherent geopolitical and normative space (Mattheis and Seabra 2022). Before 1986, the term 'Atlantic' was almost exclusively synonymous with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and Western security concerns. By naming and legitimating the 'South Atlantic' as an autonomous region, ZOPACAS established a counter-geography that reconnected Africa and South America through shared histories of slavery and colonialism, inasmuch as it did through identifying new opportunities for

cooperation. In that sense, it was not only a diplomatic initiative but a cartographic act that translated into a reimagination of global space, displacing the North as the centre of Atlantic meaning.

Second, ZOPACAS pioneered a multidimensional notion of maritime peace that explicitly fused security and development. Unlike the IOZP, which primarily centred on demilitarisation, ZOPACAS advanced the argument that sustainable peace at sea also required economic cooperation, scientific exchange and environmental stewardship (Gonçalves et al. 2025). This pushed the regional discussion beyond hard military issues toward more collaborative outcomes focused on capacity-building provision. For all intents and purposes, this multidimensional approach anticipated later debates around such concepts as human security, the blue economy and ocean sustainability.

Third, ZOPACAS sought to operationalise a transoceanic non-proliferation framework that bridged Latin American and African nuclear regimes. By attempting to formally connect the Treaty of Tlatelolco in Latin America and the then-Declaration on the Denuclearisation of Africa led by the Organization of African Unity (OAU), it aimed to constitute the South Atlantic as a continuous maritime zone of nuclear restraint. This resulted in a parallel UNGA Resolution 49/84 in 1994 that 'solemnly' endorsed the goal of turning the region into an actual NWFZ (UNGA 1994). Even if it remained a declaratory exercise, it reinforced the confidence-building path already in place between Brazil and Argentina, each with nuclear programmes of their own, corroborated the dismantling of South Africa's nuclear programme a few years prior and, ultimately, foreshadowed the signing of the Pelindaba Treaty.[31] It thereby demonstrated how oceanic spaces could embody cross-continental disarmament practices from below, reinforcing the global non-proliferation regime through regional agency.

Fourth, much like the IOZP, ZOPACAS has benefited from UN formal procedures to ensure a measure of visibility before the world at large. Between 1986 and 2025, twenty UN Secretary-General reports and twenty-three UNGA resolutions reaffirmed its principles. However, their increasing irregularity and loss of appeal have also stood out.[32] To compensate, ministerial meetings have taken place in Rio de Janeiro (1988), Abuja (1990), Brasilia (1994), Somerset

[31] In line with the end of the apartheid regime, South Africa began dismantling its nuclear stockpile in 1989 and two years later, Brazil and Argentina consolidated their bilateral rapprochement initiated in 1986 by creating the Brazilian–Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). The Treaty of Pelindaba, establishing a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone on the African continent, was signed in 1996 and came into effect on 15 July 2009.

[32] The last resolution was submitted to the UNGA in 2021, whereas the last report prepared by the UNSG was submitted in 2015.

(1996), Buenos Aires (1998), Luanda (2007), Montevideo (2013) and Mindelo (2023), vying to keep the original agenda alive amidst fleeting political interest from key countries (Abdenur, Mattheis and Seabra 2016). Though lacking permanent support structures, these gatherings have at the very least established a pattern of dialogue and symbolic reaffirmation. They even inspired later platforms such as the ASA Summits, confirming ZOPACAS as an enduring diplomatic architecture for the South Atlantic and a blueprint for future South-South maritime cooperation.[33]

Through these cumulative features, ZOPACAS was able to articulate a vision of the South Atlantic that was simultaneously geopolitical and developmental. It demonstrated that the sea could be a bridge rather than a buffer, a platform for reknitting postcolonial connections across continents, even if limitations such as lack of enforcement, uneven participation and eventual political fatigue, mirrored those of many Global South initiatives during the late Cold War. More recently, renewed interest in Atlantic cooperation frameworks by such countries as the US, Portugal or Morocco has further underscored the relevance of ZOPACAS, particularly for Brazil, as a reference point to articulate a distinct South Atlantic vision, less as a demilitarisation scheme than as a flexible diplomatic framework for managing renewed external interest within this area. In sum, the ZOPACAS represents an experiment in reversing the flow of Atlanticism. Its contribution to the idea of an ocean region lies not merely in demilitarisation but in its attempt to transform an oceanic void—long defined by absence, dependence and exploitation—into a South Atlantic community, grounded in shared norms of peace, cooperation and development.

CONCLUSION

The historical trajectories of the Indian Ocean and the South Atlantic show that the significance of maritime zones of peace lies less in their success as policy instruments and more in their persistence as practices of collective engagement and cooperation. They endured not because they achieved full demilitarisation, but because they instituted enduring habits of dialogue, mutual reassurance and regional imagination. Hence, zones of peace should be understood, first and foremost, as zones of peaceful practices, that is, arenas where the repetition of diplomatic routines, symbolic reaffirmations and cooperative gestures collectively produce regional order. Their value does not depend on quantifiable 'effectiveness' but on their ability to cultivate shared norms, stabilise expectations and maintain alternative visions of ocean governance.

[33] For instance, the Malabo Declaration, one of the outputs of the III Africa-South America summits that took place in Equatorial-Guinea from 20-22 February 2013, expressed its appreciation for the contribution of ZOPACAS in bringing both sides together (ASA Summit 2013).

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge their share of limitations. As Guilhaudis (1981: 207) once warned, 'the various proposals for zones of peace or NFZs do in fact display an odd kind of naiveté and innocence of political reality' and we 'might even be forgiven for wondering if it is really disarmament that has all along been the real objective'. However, this critique does not negate their ultimate relevance; in fact, it underlines that their contribution lies precisely in the gap between aspiration and reality. In that gap, zones of peace create political laboratories where states learn to articulate and perform regional belonging. By anchoring regional identity in the maritime domain, both the IOZP and ZOPACAS foreshadowed contemporary debates on ocean governance and provided a normative lineage for thinking about the Indian Ocean, the South Atlantic and other seascapes as coherent, self-constituted regions. Still, neither zone ever came close to producing a single, settled regional order. The IOZP fed into IORA and, more recently, into the still-forming Indo-Pacific, whereas ZOPACAS flowed into IBSA and the ASA Summits. This proliferation is arguably what maritime zones of peace end up delivering, since regions built through practice rather than through an institutionalised treaty rarely converge on a single authoritative architecture. Ocean regions may therefore be bound to remain plural and unfinished rather than fully consolidated. Yet, it is precisely this openness to recurrent contestation that keeps the idea of an ocean region alive, including who gets to define it.

This is particularly true when considering Africa's contemporary maritime condition, marked by a persistent tension between insecurity and governance experimentation. Indeed, African maritime spaces today are often narrated through the language of crisis such as piracy in the western Indian Ocean, illicit trafficking in the Gulf of Guinea, offshore resource competition and renewed external naval deployments under the banner of maritime security assistance. But the histories of maritime zones of peace discussed in this chapter point to an alternative African engagement with the sea, one that has long emphasised autonomy and collective stewardship. African states were not merely peripheral participants in these initiatives but central norm entrepreneurs, articulating visions of maritime order that sought to balance security concerns with broader political and developmental objectives.

In this sense, zones of peace encapsulate many of the dilemmas currently facing African maritime governance, including how to manage external involvement without forfeiting agency, how to link security provision to development, and how to frame the ocean as a shared regional space rather than as a fragmented set of national vulnerabilities. Seen from this perspective, maritime zones of

peace offer a rich conceptual foundation for understanding ocean regions. They demonstrate that regions are not only drawn or formalised, but can also be brought into being through repeated acts of cooperation. Recognising zones of peace as zones of peaceful practices allows them to be recovered as evolving sites where the idea of an ocean region continues to take form.

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