

**A call for Africa to turn away from sea blindness**

**Francois Vreÿ and Thomas Mandrup (eds), *Towards Good Order at Sea: African Experiences***

Sun Press, Stellenbosch, 2015

281 pp

ISBN 978 1 920689 58 2; 978 1 920689 59 9 (e book)

R325.00

Since the time centuries ago when ships were first used to transport merchandise from one place to another, pirates also arrived on the scene to prey on merchant (and in due course also other) ships. Although piracy is usually associated with the tales of swashbuckling buccaneers from especially the eighteenth century, the phenomenon has never really disappeared, albeit that for most of the twentieth century it was under control. However, the beginning of the third millennium has seen an upsurge in pirate and related activities. According to the influential London based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), maritime security is a matter of global concern, with an increase in the number of pirate attacks, the geographical escalation of the problem, as well as ongoing maritime disputes. (See, for example the IISS's 2013 edition of their flagship publication, *The Military Balance*, as well as "The 2013 Chart of Conflict" included in the 2013 edition.) Most incidents of piracy take place off the Horn of Africa, in the Gulf of Guinea, and off the Philippines, but they have also taken place in the Caribbean, off South America's west and east coasts, on India's west coast, as well as in the Bay of Bengal, and near Singapore and Indonesia.

For quite some time there was pressure on the South African government to participate actively in anti piracy operations, but it was only when pirates moved southwards along Africa's east coast, threatening shipping in the Mozambique Channel, that the South African Navy was ordered to conduct counter piracy patrols in the latter area. Under Operation Copper, at least one navy vessel (either a frigate, gunboat or combat support ship) has been doing patrol duty in the Mozambique Channel since the beginning of 2011, assisted by aircraft from the South African Air Force. Thanks to this operation, piracy in this particular area has been brought under control, just as other anti piracy operations, such as Operation Atalanta (in the Gulf of Aden, Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean) have also been successful.

It is against this background that *Towards Good Order at Sea: African Experiences* should be evaluated. The editors correctly point out that: "Historically, Africa has been continental in its strategic outlook and orientation. As a result, Africa has a tradition of neglect of its oceans, maritime resources and related affairs, resulting in a general perception of maritime insecurity on its seas." Together with Africa's growing economic, strategic and political importance, the continent has to take ownership of its seas. "The strategic reality is that the general neglect of the oceans by African leadership has resulted in a general maritime deficit and resultant lack of capacity to extend and if necessary enforce jurisdiction over its littoral waters"

(p 5). Consequently, it is the purpose of the book "to raise the stature of the maritime domain in the African security discourse" (p 6).

The editors have been able to solicit twelve chapters written by scholars from across the globe and experts in their respective fields on a variety of interrelated topics. In many instances, the topics are for obvious reasons discussed in their historical context, albeit that in several instances more historical perspectives could have been provided. In Part One of the study ("The Anti piracy Experience"), Geoffrey Till (King's College, London) inter alia points out that the concept of security has expanded and now includes non traditional threats as well as traditional ones (ch 2). In chapter three, Christian Bueger (Cardiff University) focuses on piracy off the coast of Somalia; while in chapter four, Pieter Brits and Michelle Nel (both from Stellenbosch University) provide perspectives on the lessons that have thus far been learnt from piracy. Paul Musili Wambua (University of Nairobi) proposes a theoretical framework for drawing inter linkages between the lack of good order at sea and the challenges facing landlocked countries (ch 5).

In Part Two of the book ("From Anti piracy to Good Order at Sea off Africa: Selected Debates") Johan Potgieter and Timothy Walker (both from South Africa's Institute for Security Studies) discuss the African Integrated Maritime Security (AIMS) strategy (ch 6); while John Paul Dunne (University of Cape Town) highlights the key economic argument that landlocked countries in Africa can be at a marked disadvantage concerning economic development (ch 7). In chapter eight, Huruma Luhivilo Sigalla (University of Dar es Salaam) addresses the opportunities and challenges of coastal development with the advent of globalisation in Tanzania, and places these issues in historical perspective. Another scholar from the University of Dar es Salaam, Paul Onyango, asks to what extent piracy is a threat to fisheries (ch 9). In chapter ten, Thomas Mandrup and Johannes Nordby (both from the Royal Danish Defence College) discuss frameworks for cooperation off East Africa. "Perspectives on Regional Contributions to Good Order at Sea off Africa" forms the umbrella theme for Part Three of the book, with Francois Vrey addressing good order at sea off West Africa (ch 11); while Mark Blaine (Stellenbosch University) and Joe Sinovich (South African Navy) endeavour to ascertain how SADC maritime interest can be assured through good order at sea (ch 12). In Part Three's excellent final chapter, Thean Potgieter (Stellenbosch University) indicates how crucial leadership and political will are for marine security in East Africa (ch 13).

Although not primarily a (naval) history book, *Towards Good Order at Sea: African Experiences* is an excellent publication of which those interested in naval history should take note. It addresses maritime security issues in an insightful and articulated way. It is indeed a timely and important book on the debate on how to create good governance at sea in general, but more particularly in the Western Indian Ocean, that is along Africa's lengthy east coast. As Francois Vrey correctly points out in the book's concluding chapter, good order at sea "is dependent upon leadership, political leadership in particular: firstly, leadership reinforced by political will, and secondly, political leadership that privileges and extends credible attention and resources to the much neglected African maritime landscape" (p 273). The South

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African Navy should play a much larger role in counter-piracy operations, but as this reviewer has indicated in several of his own publications on South African military, and in particular naval history, just as many others have said in other contexts our Navy needs more ships, and consequently more financial and other resources. And then there is the land-lubber mentality prevalent amongst many people of Africa, as well as the issue of sea blindness (i.e. the inability to connect with maritime issues, either at an individual or on a political level). Addressing these matters is a prerequisite for good order at sea. And, of course, much more work needs to be done with regard to Africa's neglected naval history.

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