**Skills Development: The South African Navy to serve as the backbone for SADC Naval Training**

By R Adm Matsane

It is with great honour that I meet with these distinguished maritime experts. Thank you for providing me with this opportunity.

The importance of Maritime Security is unquestionable. Maritime Security is a lifeline for any nation. Africa needs maritime security for peace, stability, social and economic development (transformation and growth) and human security. It is the precursor for creating an inclusive and sustainable blue economy.

To preserve maritime security, law enforcement and good order at sea are intertwined and inevitable – only navies and coastguards can be equipped and trained to enforce the law and maintain good order at sea. I recognise that maritime security is not a one-person show, it needs cooperation, collaboration and collective responses from various agencies and departments, however without a navy, it is unattainable. The changes in the maritime challenges/threats in the north of Mozambique have strengthened the requirement for Naval Forces in Africa.

The Horn of Africa, with the Houthis operations, is demonstrating the same reality of the importance of Naval Forces in Africa. We can learn from these two examples or maritime domains to avoid future recurrence. Taking from Winston Churchill, I quote, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it “unquote. Naval Forces are flexible and versatile – from military operations to constabulary roles to diplomatic missions, peacetime operations, or Military Operations Other Than War or nation-building. We need such forces because the world is changing very fast; angry and frustrated people are everywhere, leading to unrest. In my mother’s tongue, “Tiko axi etleli” the direct translation is “the world does not sleep”. Therefore, we need flexibility and a versatile instrument. For the African Maritime Domain that instrument is the navies.

Reliance on international Navies is a curse to Africa; they will only be available when it suits them or serves their interest. Hence the Gulf of Guinea has remained an African Nightmare compared to the Horn of Africa, whose everyone’s interest was affected.

Therefore, Africa needs navies, maritime security, law enforcement and good order at sea. Africa cannot survive with Maritime Insecurity. The demand for shipping will increase over time as nations will be involved in international trade irrespective of their level of industrialisation. The African blue economy strategy is only five years old. Which means we are about to start in tapping what the African Maritime Domain has to offer, as a collective. Therefore, Africa needs resources to deal with current and emerging threat in the African Maritime Domain.

Two types of resources are required: Prime Mission Equipment and people. Prime Mission Equipment are ships for patrols and effective surveillance sensors. The Lomé Charter calls for patrols and surveillance in the African Maritime Domain. Surveillance is essential, but it simply gives you eyes. However, vessels will provide you with eyes and the ability to respond to threats. African nations with regards to Prime Mission Equipment or vessels to be specific, are struggling to acquire them especial ships, but African nations still receive donations or acquire second hand Prime Mission Equipment ie. Ships. In their study African Navies in the Twenty-First Century, Alexander Hill and Timothy Stapleton do an excellent job of highlighting this. We could also practise public-private partnerships to acquire PME, which the Lomé Charter proposes.

However, acquiring ships or PME is one thing, and maintaining them or keeping them in service is another. The majority of these ships don’t last because of poor maintenance, unskilled operators, and a lack of operational experience and general discipline.

What then? What then?

On the other hand, the second resource required is people. People need skills. Skills development is a necessity – to maintain and operate equipment, conduct operations, and maintain discipline. These can be achieved through Combined Joint training.

The South African Navy has the potential to become the backbone of SADC naval training: It has been operating significant warships – Combat Support Ships, Frigate, Submarines and smaller vessels. Some are built in South Africa – the Multi-Mission Inshore Patrol Vessels (some delivered), and Hydrographic Survey Vessel (under construction), just to metion the recent ones. The SAN maintains these warships and operates them from construction. Furthermore, the South African Navy is producing charts, conducting hydrographic surveys as well as Search and Rescue over a large area.

Even though some need refurbishment, the South African Navy has more facilities for ship maintenance than the rest of the SADC nations. The South African Navy trains most of its sailors and collaborates and cooperates with other larger navies in training. It conducts multinational exercises with several large and formidable navies, such as exercise ATLASUR, GOOD HOPE, IBSAMAR, MOSI, OXIDE, SHARED ACCORD. These exercises bring various experiences, skills, and knowledge from North and South America, Europe, South and East Asia to the South African Navy.

Leveraging these experiences from the South African Navy will capacitate the SADC Navies, which are needed more than ever.

Therefore, making the South African Navy the backbone of SADC Naval training will benefit the SADC region and eventually Africa as a whole.

Combined integrated training is the way forward for the SADC navies. Create a SADC Maritime Centre of Excellence, expanding from what the South African Navy has.

AIMS 2050, the Djibouti Code of Conduct and the Jeddah amendment call for the creation of a Maritime Centre of Excellence.

SADC IMSS calls for ‘capacity building including basic and specialised training …’ and it calls for States to “support the allocation of funding for national and regional maritime training …..” as well as for the “strengthening of Maritime Joint Exercises and Training to enhance interoperability.”

The Africa Blue Economy Strategy- promote training of actors – to ensure security and safety. The African Charter on Maritime Security and Safety and Development in Africa (popular known as the Lome Charter**)** states that “strengthening law enforcement through training and professionalisation of navies, calls for cooperation in maritime security and safety.”

**The opportunities in combined joint training are** Combined Joint doctrine (standardised training), Sharing information, experience and collaboration, Mutual understanding, Mutual trust – strengthen relations, Improving readiness, Innovation and adaptation, Improve combined patrols, Sharing of resources, Industry engagement and Economic growth.

**Combine Joint training has some challenges such as:** Operational Security concerns,Geopolitics constraints, Language and cultural differences, Resources (infrastructures, funding) constraints, and Interoperability challenges. By training together we will learn to deal with them.

I conclude with Admiral Arleigh Burke’s words. I quote “A regional system would demonstrate that the nations of an area have a mutual concern for stability in the area and are willing to take action to maintain that stability. It also would provide an excellent base for similar cooperation in economic matters and perhaps even in other political matters” Unquote

We have the foundation, let us built on it.

I wish all seafarers fair winds and following seas

I thank you