

INDIA-AFRICA DEFENCE COOPERATION: MOVING BEYOND ENGAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

India and Africa have been faithful friends and neighbours through the ages. Both have the commonality of suffering during colonialism. Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela have been another binding factor between the two apart from being bonded by the majestic Indian Ocean, thus making each other neighbours indeed. The long sharing diasporic connections all over the African continent have been on the rise since then. Over the centuries, trade links between India and Africa expanded, bringing not only goods but also people from the subcontinent to Africa, which now has two million people of Indian origin.¹ India being one of the largest contributors to the United Nations peacekeeping forces is the testament of the close and formidable association between the two. Cooperation in the fields

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1. Alex Vines, Programme, "India's Africa Engagement: Prospects for the 2011 India-Africa Forum", Paper: AFP 2010, December 1, 2010, p. 3, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/1210vines.pdf>. Accessed on February 9, 2022.

of infrastructure, soft power, capacity building, defence cooperation has been the bedrock of the synergistic association.

UNPKF Contribution. India's contributions to UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) have been highlighted by the involvement and competence of India's armed forces. Prime Minister Modi, while speaking at the Leaders' Summit on UN peacekeeping in 2015, said that "The brave soldiers laid the foundations of the United Nations on the battlefields of the Second World War. By 1945, they included 2.5 million men of the Indian Army, the largest volunteer force in history. India today is the largest contributor of troops to UNPKOs. More than 200,000 Indian troops have served in 49 of the 71 UNPKOs deployed so far."² India has contributed in many ways to strengthen UN peacekeeping. In a recent contribution, it delivered 200,000 doses of made-in-India COVID-19 vaccines, which has helped vaccinate 140,000 field personnel.

PRESENT ENGAGEMENT WITH AFRICA

China's foray into Africa has been extensively documented and is quite significantly visible on the ground. On the other hand, India's approach has been far more understated, garnering far less attention until 2008, when the first-ever India–Africa Forum meeting was held in April 2008 in New Delhi. This provided a new perspective on the modern race for Africa, which is the continent of hope in this century. The effort since then has moved ahead, but the pace is relatively slow. The Forum's next summit meeting was held in an African country in 2011.³

With the formation of the India-Africa Forum Summits (IAFS), India-Africa cooperation achieved new heights. India's relationship with Africa became more structured, and commercial ties between the two countries grew significantly. India declared the Duty-Free Tariff Preference Scheme, a new credit line of US\$ 5.4 billion, and

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2. Asoke Kumar Mukerji, "UN Peacekeeping: India's Contributions", November 8, 2019, https://mea.gov.in/articles-in-indianmedia.htm?dtl/32014/UN_Peacekeeping_Indias_Contributions. Accessed on February 9, 2022.
 3. Alex Vines. Programme, "India's Africa Engagement: Prospects for the 2011 India-Africa Forum". Paper: AFP 2010, December 1, 2010, p. 4, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Africa/1210vines.pdf>. Accessed on February 9, 2022.

an upsurge in the number of scholarships for African students at the inaugural Summit in 2008. A proposal to develop tighter collaboration for food security was launched at the second Summit in 2011. In addition, India has committed a new credit line of US\$ 5 billion as well as US\$ 700 million in grant aid for the establishment of new institutions in Africa.

The third India-Africa Forum Summit, on the other hand, was unquestionably a watershed moment. Unlike the previous two summits, which followed the Banjul Principle, this one included all 54 African countries, making it more representative. During the summit, India announced a series of financial assistance such as a new US\$ 10 billion credit line, US\$ 600 million in financial aid, and 50,000 additional scholarships for African students. Following the summit, the Indian President, Vice President, and Prime Minister paid a series of high-profile visits. The Prime Minister's visit to Africa in July 2016 was centred on increased maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean region.⁴

In September 2019, an India-Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) Sub-Committee review meeting was held in Delhi. It covered the entire development cooperation, which has gained traction in recent years. New fields of cooperation, such as digital technology, solar energy, traditional medicine, Indian Lines of Credit, and so on, have been identified as ways to strengthen bilateral interaction. The African countries' overwhelming support for the International Solar Alliance, led by India, was greatly appreciated and resulted in tremendous success.

With the unprecedented engagement with Africa in mind, India's Union Cabinet planned to open 18 new Embassies and High Commissions in Africa over the next four years, bringing the total number of Indian Missions in Africa to 47. Towards that, the first mission was opened in Rwanda in 2018. This decision has strengthened and ensured India's diplomatic outreach in Africa, allowing India to

4. Malancha Chakrabarty, "Understanding India's Engagement with Africa", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, vol. 11, no. 3, July–September 2016, p. 268, [http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol11/11.3/11.3-ARTICLE per cent204.pdf](http://associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol11/11.3/11.3-ARTICLE_per%204.pdf). Accessed on February 9, 2022.

engage with the Indian Diaspora in African countries.⁵ India has also expressed its support for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and the two countries will work together to find ways to make it a reality.⁶

India sees Africa as a top priority in its foreign policy. The current NDA government has devised a strategy to strengthen ties with African countries in the future. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, New Delhi took new steps to help Africa by expediting the delivery of medicines and vaccines. Africa and India should keep their engagement at its topmost priority for mutual benefit. Perhaps it was for this reason that External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar made a substantive intervention in the UN Security Council's open debate on conflict and post-pandemic recovery in Africa in May 2021. Concerning politico-diplomatic issues, he expressed regret that "the voice of Africa is not given its due" in the Security Council.⁷ Mr. Jaishankar emphasised India's role in African peacekeeping, supporting African counterterrorism operations, and providing training and capacity-building assistance to African institutions. India's economic development assistance to Africa is expected to grow larger. It is time to seize the opportunity and re-establish Africa as India's primary diplomatic and economic partner.⁸

Critical Trade Review. Despite all efforts by the government, India-Africa trade has been found to be on the decline. As per the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in 2020-2021, "India's exports

5. Elizabeth Roche, "18 New Indian Missions in Africa to be opened in next 4 years", March 22, 2018, *Livemint*, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/mj927nlKDcH8VLZTGjTeDP/18-new-Indian-missions-in-Africa-to-be-opened-in-next-4-year.html>. Accessed on February 9, 2022.
6. MEA Website of GoI, "Joint Press Statement by India and the African Union on the Mid-Term Review Meeting of the Strategic Cooperation Framework of India-Africa Forum Summit III", <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateraldocuments.htm?dtl/31819/Joint+Press+Statement+by+India+and+the+African+Union+on+the+MidTerm+Review+Meeting+of+the+Strategic+Cooperation+Framework+of+IndiaAfrica+Forum+Summit+III>. Accessed on January 14, 2022.
7. Ministry of External Affairs, Media Centre, Address by External Affairs Minister at the UNSC Open Debate on "Peace and Security in Africa: addressing root causes of conflict while promoting post-pandemic recovery in Africa", May 19, 2021, <https://bit.ly/3qle5Kl>. Accessed on February 9, 2022.
8. Rajiv Bhatia, "Re-energizing India's Africa policy", *The Hindu*, June 26, 2021, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/re-energizing-indias-africa-policy/>. Accessed on February 9, 2022.

to and imports from Africa stood at \$27.7 billion and \$28.2 billion respectively, a reduction of 4.4 per cent and 25 per cent over the previous year. Thus, bilateral trade valued at \$55.9 billion in 2020-21 fell by \$10.8 billion compared to 2019-20, and \$15.5 billion compared to the peak year of 2014-15." CII reports that "India's investments in Africa saw a decrease from \$3.2 billion in 2019-20 to \$2.9 billion in 2020-21. Total investments over 25 years, from April 1996 to March 2021, are now just \$70.7 billion, which is about one-third of China's investment in Africa". Adding to this downfall, COVID-19 has further caused an adverse impact on the Indian and African economies. African countries Nigeria, South Africa, Kenya, Togo and Egypt are India's top five markets today. India imports the most from Nigeria, Angola, Egypt, South Africa and Guinea. And petroleum products, mineral fuels, vehicles and pharmaceutical products are India's top three exports to Africa. The top two imports from Africa are crude oil, pearls and precious or semi-precious stones, accounting for more than 77 per cent of our total imports. Over the last two decades, the India-Africa trade has remained largely unchanged.⁹

China Inroads into Africa. While India has been contributing to international peacekeeping forces in Africa for over six decades, China has increased its presence in the continent over the last decade quite vigorously. A viewpoint is that India has viewed African peacekeeping through a diplomatic lens, using it to bolster its claims to a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Similarly, on the other hand, China has seen peacekeeping raise its military profile in Africa and learn the art of power projection. Beijing currently has nearly 2,400 peacekeepers in Africa and is training a large number of regional peacekeepers. In addition, China has pledged \$100 million in grant funding to help Africa develop a rapid response force to deal with regional crises. Along with increasing military assistance and arms sales, China is easing into political mediation and conflict resolution on the continent, albeit cautiously. Apart from the traditional areas of military security, Beijing has made significant progress with African governments on internal security, particularly in the areas of counterterrorism and money laundering. In addition,

9. Ibid.

strengthening domestic police forces has become a key component of China's African security strategy.

PRESENCE OF FOREIGN MILITARY

As Africa is the continent of hope in the 21st century, it has drawn renewed attention to the foreign security operations in Africa. Numerous African governments have allowed basing the foreign military bases in their country despite the African Union's Peace and Security Council's concerns about the emergence of foreign military bases in Africa as a whole. The African Union is also concerned about its inability to track weapons moving in and out of these military bases. Regardless, the spread of overseas forces across the continent is based on bilateral agreements between African member states and other international powers.

Nearly a dozen foreign powers have a substantial military presence on the continent. The United States and France are pioneers in conducting operations in the African continent to fight against several military groups in the conflict zones across Africa. The recent one is northern Mozambique.¹⁰ Currently, 7,000 US military personnel are stationed in Africa on a rotational basis. These troops collaborate with African forces to fight extremists and jihadists.¹¹ They are stationed in military outposts in Senegal, Uganda, Niger, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Gabon and the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition, 2,000 American soldiers are serving in 40 African countries on training missions.¹²

Foreign military forces in Africa are not restricted to Western countries. For example, China has been militarily active in the Horn of Africa since

10. Theo Neethling, "Why foreign countries (including India) are jostling to set up military bases in Africa", *The Conversation*, September 26, 2020, <https://scroll.in/article/973885/why-foreign-countries-including-india-are-jostling-to-set-up-military-bases-in-africa>. Accessed on February 11, 2022.

11. Daniel Mumbere, "Turkey joins United States, France on list of countries with troops in Africa", *Africa News*, January 14, 2020, <https://www.africanews.com/2020/01/14/turkey-joins-united-states-france-on-list-of-countries-with-troops-in-africa/>. Accessed on February 11, 2022.

12. "Foreign military activity increasing in the Horn of Africa", *defenceWeb*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.defenceweb.co.za/featured/foreign-military-activity-increasing-in-the-horn-of-africa/#:percent7E:text=Thepercent20presencepercent20ofpercent20foreignpercent20militaries,securitypercent20environmentpercent2Cpercent20newpercent20researchpercent20finds>. Accessed on February 11, 2022.

2008. This was when it embarked on an international anti-piracy effort in the Gulf of Aden.¹³ Following that, China's naval presence in the Gulf of Aden and Horn of Africa has remained constant. It deployed 26,000 military personnel in multiple maritime security operations between 2008 and 2018. Finally, in 2017, Djibouti became China's first overseas military base. The United States established Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti in 2003. Lemonnier was founded alongside bases in Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Japan.

China has built a military base that will house tens of thousands of Chinese troops, rotary and fixed-wing aircraft and ships.¹⁴ Djibouti's Chinese military base was built to conduct anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and counterterrorism operations. The United Arab Emirates and Turkey in West Asia also have a significant military presence in Africa. In 2009, Turkey joined an international anti-piracy task force off the coast of Somalia.¹⁵ It established a military base in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 2017. The goal is to prepare Somali National Army recruits. Turkey will also provide assistance to Somalia's navy and coastguard. Since 2015, the UAE has had a military airfield with aircraft shelters and a deep-water naval port in Eritrea. In Yemen, the base has been used to conduct operations against opposition forces. The Horn of Africa has unmistakably become the focal point of military activity by others in Africa. They have been stationed there to combat threats to global peace, as well as to apprehend terrorists and pirates and to support foreign security initiatives.

Other reasons for foreign military forces to establish their bases in Africa include safeguarding commercial interests and affiliating with friendly regimes to ensure dominance in the continent that is the focus of rising global competition. At the same time, most African governments want to host them because mutual arrangements with major powers provide revenue to African countries. The establishment of military base in Djibouti by China is such an example. Djibouti's economy is mainly

13. Chris Alden, "Beijing's Security Plans beyond Djibouti and the Horn", September 27, 2018, <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/beijings-security-plans-beyond-djibouti-and-horn-21278>. Accessed on February 11, 2022.

14. "Djibouti—China Naval Base", Global Security, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/djibouti/forrel-prc-base.htm>. Accessed on February 11, 2022.

15. Andrews Atta-Asamoah, "Proceed with caution: Africa's growing foreign military presence", ISS, August 27, 2019, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/proceed-with-caution-africas-growing-foreign-military-presence>. Accessed on February 11, 2022.

reliant on Chinese credit. The increasing presence of Asian powers has heightened competition among some of the world's powers. Therefore, concerns have been raised about China's growing presence in Djibouti, which could hamper their efforts to engage with Africa.¹⁶

PRESENCE OF INDIA'S MILITARY

India and Africa have a long and rich history together. The two guiding principles that underpin India-Africa defence relations are "SAGAR or Security and Growth for All in the Region", and "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "The World is One Family". India has begun its presence in the Indian Ocean due to China's rising naval presence in the region, with frequent deployments of the Indian Navy in the western Indian Ocean. To counter China's growing military presence in the region, it has set up a network of military facilities across the Indian Ocean. It also wants to keep piracy out of its trade sea lanes. India also has ongoing positionings in Madagascar and the Horn of Africa to monitor the developments. In addition, the country has agreed to set up 32 coastal radar surveillance stations in the Seychelles and Mauritius and a few other locations outside of Africa.

Anti-piracy patrols in the Gulf of Aden, the northern Indian Ocean, and the Strait of Hormuz, dedicated missions in the Mauritius, Madagascar and Seychelles, and the southern Indian Ocean are the primary tasks it undertakes. In addition, India has attempted to establish an infrastructure of military facilities across the Indian Ocean at the beginning of 2007 with the opening of a naval monitoring station in northern Madagascar, to protect the country's sea lines of communication from piracy and to counter rising military presence of China in the region.

India has declared intentions to build a network of chain of coastal radar monitoring stations in Seychelles, Mauritius, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka to offer maritime domain awareness. India installed a coastal radar system in Seychelles in 2015. As per the reports in 2018, "India and Seychelles announced that they would continue to work in tandem to develop a naval base on Assumption Island, with India agreeing to provide Seychelles with a \$100 million line of

16. Theo Neethling, n. 10.

credit to purchase military equipment and a maritime patrol aircraft. In addition, the construction of military facilities on the Mauritian archipelago of Agalega, including an enlarged runway and new port facilities.”¹⁷ As part of soft power, India has placed only five “Defence Attaché” and maintains only a few “Indian Military Training Team” in the continent. Such military presence is minuscule in the overall ambition of having a firm foothold in the continent. India should expedite expanding its soft power to a meaningful existence.

DEFENCE DIALOGUE BETWEEN INDIA AND AFRICA

In February 2020, the Ministry of Defence and External Affairs co-hosted the first-ever India-Africa Defence Ministers Conclave (IADMC) in conjunction with DefExpo. This was the first of a series of ministerial-level Pan Africa events leading up to the India-Africa Forum Summit IV. Following IADMC 2020, a Joint Declaration was adopted as the Conclave’s outcome document.¹⁸ India proposed to institutionalise the India Africa Defence Dialogue during successive DefExpos to be held once every two years, in accordance with the declaration and consultation with stakeholders. The establishment of the India-Africa Defence Dialogue will aid in the strengthening of existing African-Indian partnerships and explore new areas of convergence for mutual engagement, such as capacity building, training, cybersecurity, maritime security, and counterterrorism.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is in India’s long-term strategic interests to engage African countries constructively. With the rising signatures of the United States and China in Africa, it is necessary to take steps to engage better with African countries and convert them into deliverables. Tool of military diplomacy should be used more effectively to promote overall symbiotic relations between India and African countries. Interaction with countries that extend strategic spin-offs should also be pursued aggressively. India must also follow a proactive policy of involving individual countries and regions militarily in totality.

17. defenceWeb, n. 12.

18. PIB Delhi, “Year End Review—2020 Ministry of Defence”, January 1, 2021, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1685437>. Accessed on February 10, 2022.

Stronger military connections with African countries would also present a tremendous opportunity for India to expand its influence in the Indian Ocean region.

Undoubtedly, the partnership between Africa and India is not rhetoric under the garb of old historical ties and mutual respect, but it has got substantial and measurable tangibles to prove the fact. Nevertheless, there is still a lot to be done, especially with the speed of action. The ten guiding principles for Africa announced by Prime Minister Modi in Uganda in 2018 aptly sum up the roadmap and vision for India to focus on for better ties with the African nations. Following guiding principles for enhancing cooperation with Africa will unlock the immense potential that our renewed partnership still holds. In addition to these, to make engagements meaningful and worthwhile, a few recommendations for our continued partnership are elaborated to ponder upon.

- (i) **Act Africa—Move Beyond Engagement.** India is pretty well engaging with Africa, and to some extent, it is visible too, but its pace requires constant course correction, as we are late in the action. India's diplomacy works at a set speed and pattern. The outlook of government at the centre is the lynchpin of such projects. As the global polity of both traditional and emerging powers is visiting Africa quite often, India does not have much leeway in terms of following a slow or medium pace. Therefore, India must change over to a brisk approach towards Africa this time. The engagement phase with Africa is now a delayed option, and now is the time to move beyond engagement and act vigorously.
- (ii) **Speeding Up Defence Diplomacy.** It is high time India drew an actionable roadmap towards defence diplomacy. This tentacle of diplomacy proves to be very effective and probably the fastest for renewed partnership. It can be derived with many certainties that India and Africa can do wonders in this mode of actionable international diplomacy. India can move beyond contributing to the UNPKF and training teams in African countries to establish certain military bases, especially the elements of Air Force.
- (iii) **Winning Hearts and Minds (WHAM).** An actionable roadmap towards a very effective tool of winning the hearts and minds of

people through various efforts such as adopting villages cities or selecting some specific issues of most significant concern in the area could be efficient. Such measures are to be based on local capacity building and development. The Diasporic connection will be of immense benefit in accomplishing the objectives. All facets of comprehensive national power, including the armed forces, can pool into the aspect of capacity and capability building by adopting WHAM.

- (iv) **East Africa Cooperation.** To start with, India must focus on the East African countries first with a vision of reducing the distance between India and Africa through the Indian Ocean in the realm of development and mutual benefit. The establishment of military detachments, especially the Air Force, will prove beneficial in the long run. Currently, this recommendation may sound like an out of the box idea, but it may pay actual dividends in the future in consolidating the futuristic bilateral engagements and countering the adverse presence in the Western Indian Ocean region.
- (v) **Creation of Post of MoS for Africa in MEA.** Irrespective of the government of the day, think tanks, academicians, economic leaders, experts from the field of health, medicine, education, power, telecommunication, water, sanitation, etc., along with government machinery, must get together to firmly spell out the national approach towards a symbiotic relationship between India and Africa. Creating a post of Minister of State for Africa under the Ministry of External Affairs or Ministry of Defence is a viable option. This part of the ministry would be the Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for all affairs related to Africa. It will enable a forthcoming approach towards Africa through defined priorities for India-Africa in a Win-Win situation to symbiotically plan and execute the tasks.