

India–Africa Maritime Security and Strategic Cooperation in the Twenty-First Century

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India–Africa maritime security and strategic cooperation has emerged as a paramount focus area in recent times. This growing emphasis is driven primarily by a renewed interest in bolstering naval capabilities by both India and African countries. The need for greater South-South cooperation has become increasingly evident as it serves as a crucial avenue to minimise strategic vulnerabilities and accomplish shared goals envisioned by both India and African nations. This article makes an attempt to understand the driving factors between increasing maritime security and strategic cooperation between India and African nations, particularly those in East Africa and WIOR, to analyse the areas of maritime security and strategic cooperation and to evaluate the challenges they face in this regard.

Keywords: *India, Africa, Maritime Security, Strategic Cooperation, Indian Ocean Region (IOR)*

INTRODUCTION

India has historically had strong ties with African countries through its vast diaspora, vibrant trade, vital energy security partnerships and venerable institutions such as India–Africa Forum Summits (IAFS). In addition,

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common support for shared causes such as the struggle against colonialism and apartheid has built solidarity between India and African countries. India–Africa maritime security and strategic cooperation has emerged as a paramount focus area in recent times. This growing emphasis is driven primarily by a renewed interest in bolstering naval capabilities by both India and African countries. The need for greater South-South cooperation has become increasingly evident as it serves as a crucial avenue to minimise strategic vulnerabilities and accomplish shared goals envisioned by both India and African nations. This collaboration has become indispensable, especially in the face of evolving and complex security challenges in the maritime domain.

The collaboration between India and African countries in maritime security and strategic matters holds immense significance for regional and global stability. By aligning their efforts, these nations can collectively address common challenges such as piracy, illegal trafficking, and maritime terrorism, which have a direct impact on the safety and prosperity of their respective regions. This concerted approach not only enhances security but also fosters economic advancement. However, India's foreign policy in the past focused more on its Eastern neighbours through strategies such as the Look East Policy (later on the Act East). However, the recognition of the geostrategic importance of the Western Indian Ocean Region (WIOR) has blossomed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has bolstered India–Africa relations through various efforts such as the ones highlighted in the ten guiding principles for India–Africa engagement and the 2015 Maritime Strategy document.

In this context, this article makes an attempt to understand the driving factors between increasing maritime security and strategic cooperation between India and African nations, particularly those in East Africa and WIOR; to analyse the areas of maritime security and strategic cooperation and to evaluate the challenges they face in this regard.

DRIVERS OF INCREASED MARITIME SECURITY AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND AFRICAN NATIONS

Common Maritime Security Perceptions

India and African countries are confronted by multiple maritime security threats, which require a coordinated response. The challenges range from increasing piracy, transnational crimes, mounting infrastructure

vulnerabilities, depleting maritime biodiversity, arms and drugs trafficking among the others.¹ India and Africa understand the severity of these threats and therefore have been making efforts to develop a proactive approach to ensure maritime sovereignty, security and regional commitments in a tremendously active geo-strategic atmosphere. This has led to better alignment of maritime security perceptions and efforts to respond to them holistically.² Some of the common maritime security challenges that India and Africa face are:

Traditional Threats and Security Challenges

As the WIOR gains recognition for its strategic location as a major energy and trade route, the challenges faced in the region are becoming increasingly complex and multifaceted. These challenges encompass a wide range of issues, including threats to vital sea lines of communication, disruptions to trading routes, and vulnerabilities at critical chokepoints. Moreover, the region is experiencing an alarming surge in the militarisation of naval power and intensified competition among various stakeholders, adding further complexities to the already intricate situation. One of the most pressing challenges in the WIOR is safeguarding the security and stability of sea lines of communication, which are essential for the transportation of energy resources and trade goods between Asia, Africa and the West Asia (Middle East). The free flow of maritime commerce in the region is crucial for the global economy, and any disruptions to these crucial routes can have severe implications worldwide. Addressing these threats requires collaborative efforts among nations, maritime organisations, and stakeholders to enhance maritime security through information-sharing and joint cooperation.³

Furthermore, Indian strategic focus has expanded beyond its borders and has begun to be focus on expanding its sphere of influence. Considering the stakes, India has been ramping up its engagement in the WIOR. Increased engagement comes with its own traditional security threats. In order to combat these challenges, India has been working towards enhancing its military engagement in the region and augmenting its capacity building. African nations, likewise, contribute their knowledge and experience in navigating the choppy waters.

The Rise of China

The rise of China has been a significant development, which has impacted not only global geopolitics but also the existing maritime security dynamics in the WIOR. Moreover, it has been observed that the Chinese maritime strategy's prime aim is to expand its own nautical authority from Chinese

‘near seas’. Although, the Chinese have claimed their actions to be defensive,⁴ these have been viewed as invasive and even belligerent by other countries. Xu Weizhong, the director of the Institute of African Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations has postulated that security in the African continent stands as the ‘barometer of the global security governance system’,⁵ thereby, emphasising the importance of resource-rich Africa and its geo-strategic relevance. This is best exemplified through the attempts made by several countries to ramp up their engagement in the region. Due to the hardline approach adopted by China, tensions are likely to rise among countries competing for domination in this region. This is not in the interest of India or any African countries.

China has been positioning itself as a leading power on the African continent through its maritime silk road initiative. Backed by its economic might, China has also been expanding its military presence on the continent. This is best evidenced in the establishment of the first Chinese military base abroad in Djibouti, which secures Chinese presence in the Horn of Africa until 2026.⁶ Moreover, the Chinese have provided Cameroon, Nigeria and the Republic of Congo with naval vessels. China has similarly been supporting the construction of multiple infrastructure projects including a port, which could provide future advantages in the maritime domain.

In addition, all African countries are involved in economic trade with Chinese companies. The Chinese Maritime Silk Infrastructure (MSR) investment programme can be utilised to acquire probable naval bases through debt-trap diplomacy. Thus, Chinese investment has resulted in increased vulnerability of the African continent’s natural maritime assets. Moreover, the Chinese navy has conducted naval exercises with the Russians and South Africans in South African waters. The mission was stated to be securitisation of international waters and cooperation in the Gulf of Aden with escort expeditions as well.⁷

Another important aspect of the Chinese presence is the discovery of resources off the coast of Gulf of Guinea, which have given rise to increased instances of ‘petro-piracy’.⁸ Wherein, pirates deliberately target tankers carrying consignments comprised of hydrocarbon from resource-rich areas of West Africa for transportations to other countries. Pirates have even set-up illegal refineries,⁹ thereby, increasing the variety of hydrocarbons for pillage. Moreover, these events have the potential to pique the interest of the Chinese state as it acquires a substantial amount of their hydrocarbons from Africa. The deteriorating political situation off the coast of Horn of Africa, exacerbated by piracy remains a matter of concern for the Chinese as

well and may result in increased Chinese presence in the region to protect its interests.

Anticipating the challenges that China may face in the WIOR, China has already outlined 20 kinds of campaigns it can undertake during a conflict. The six fundamental campaign strategies planned by the People's Liberation Army Navy in case of a maritime conflict include sea blockade campaign, anti-sea lines of communication (SLOC) campaign, sea-to-land attack campaign, antiship campaign, sea transportation protection campaign and naval base defence campaign.¹⁰ This would require advance planning by other countries to counter. The Chinese have also been investing enormous amount of money on the modernisation of their navy for unhindered operations.

Scholars opine that the Chinese have learned several strategic paradigms from British colonialism, as their actions have indicated the replication of the British model in Africa. The prevailing view amongst scholars refers to the understanding that the British empire thrived because Britain employed not only advanced military hardware and the armed forces, but also owned the infrastructure consisting of various ports, canals and shipping lanes. The Chinese are doing the same with their Belt and Road Initiative by going even further as norms are set in a way to favour China.¹¹ Furthermore, the Chinese view ports controlled by them to have 'strategic dimensions',¹² when taken together with the colossal inroads that China has been able to carve out in the region. This has resulted in the intensification of the Chinese threat perception.

Meanwhile, India's geographical position, its benign intentions and its potential to be a net security provider for countries from Bab-el-Mandeb to the Malacca Strait make it an ideal partner for African nations to work with. Under the current political administration in India, the budget for the navy has increased along with the expansion of naval vessels. India has been focusing on utilising choke points such as the Mozambique Channel as a 'bargaining chip'.¹³ As such cooperation with African nations is essential, especially to deny the Chinese more control over these vital chokepoints.¹⁴

Moreover, Chinese influence has already started changing India's relationships with African countries such as Seychelles with whom India has had a good relationship. For instance, in 2018, the parliament of Seychelles did not ratify a deal, which would have allowed India to build an air strip and a jetty on Assumption Island for Indian navy as well as the Seychellean armed forces.¹⁵ New Delhi has also enhanced its efforts. For instance, on 30 October 2022, India successfully conducted its inaugural trilateral naval exercise with Tanzania and Mozambique, with a primary focus on the

strategic WIOR, coinciding with China's increasing investments in dual-use infrastructure.¹⁶

Furthermore, the Chinese uphold the view that their involvement is less exploitative in nature than the Global North and is therefore, better positioned to address the needs of the countries in the Global South. By promoting this narrative, China has been offering soft loans to African countries, which may prove to be useful to them in the short term but eventually lead to debt-trap.

Non-Traditional Threats

Apart from traditional security threats, the region is also mired in several pressing non-traditional security challenges. These include problems arising out of climate change, which will affect densely packed coastal regions with critical maritime infrastructure, marine-based pollution, threats to off-shore installations, narcotics smuggling, infringements of exclusive economic zones, increase in the number of foreign private mercenary groups operating in the region, human trafficking, climate change-induced natural disasters likely to result in loss of sovereign territory, unforeseen alteration in maritime possessions and vulnerability of underwater cables among others. Over the years, the spectre of non-traditional threats has expanded to encompass maritime terrorism whose targets include tourist centres, iconic landmarks, nuclear plants and oil rigs. One of the reasons that renewed focus is being placed on non-traditional threats is due to its extended linkages to traditional threats. For example, issues such as maritime terrorism are hybrid in nature with an ability to transform into lethal forms due to its access to profit-oriented off-the-shelf technology and support from state sponsors of terrorism.

Concerns for the marine environment is another common challenge faced by India and the African continent. India and African countries in their Delhi Declaration of 2015, agreed to work together for the betterment of the marine environment through the implementation of a blue economy. This can emerge as one of the areas of convergences between India and African countries for better future cooperation. On a bilateral level, India and South Africa acknowledged and decided to reinforce cooperation in order to achieve better practices in marine resource harvesting such as 'aquaculture and aquatic product processing'¹⁷ so as to assist in the preservation of the marine environment.

Furthermore, India has already agreed to cooperate with Madagascar for the management of marine resources, which could be used as a template for greater cooperation with other countries. The Indian Navy has undertaken a series of high-impact engagements with African countries along the east

coast and Southern WIOR to strengthen maritime cooperation. Meanwhile, Indian naval ships, INS Trishul and INS Sunayna, have made 16 port visits to eight African nations in a four-month period, showcasing India's commitment to enhancing security cooperation. Joint military exercises, such as the Maritime Partnership Exercises (MPX), have bolstered operational capabilities and countered maritime threats effectively. Coordinated patrols with countries like Mozambique, Seychelles and Mauritius addressed shared concerns over maritime security. The visits also included capacity-building activities to support African nations' self-sufficiency and enhance capabilities. Overall, this collaboration projects India as a preferred security partner in the region, demonstrating India's growing presence in the maritime domain and emphasising the importance of cooperation between India and Africa.¹⁸ India is therefore dynamically involved in agenda-setting, institution-building as well as capacity-building of African countries participating in IOC so as to increase efforts exerted for the preservation of marine ecosystems.

Growing Emphasis on South-South Cooperation

India emphasises on increasing South-South cooperation as it can offer opportunities for the revitalisation of India–Africa relations, sharing knowledge and transformative experiences so as to rise together. India likewise strives to overcome mutual obstacles and emerge as a steadfast partner. Meanwhile, South-South cooperation is being given importance by African countries who recognise the several mutual convergences with India. For example, Tanzania in 2016, signed five agreements with India including deals pertaining to the maritime domain as large natural gas deposits were found off the coast of the country.¹⁹ This has enhanced the threat level within the country and thus is on the lookout for reliable and strong partners. Mozambican leaders are interested in closer cooperation with India to promote and increase security in the Indian Ocean Region.²⁰ India and Africa as part of South-South cooperation are extending their collaboration across various areas such as from Government to Government (G2G), Women to Women (W2W) cooperation, People to People (P2P) ties, Business to Consumer (B2C) and Business to Business (B2B) to naval cooperation.

To emphasise the importance of South-South cooperation, the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi invited the President of the Republic of South Africa, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa as the Chief Guest for India's 70th Republic Day Parade on 26 January 2019.²¹ This led to the signing of the Three-Year Strategic Programme of Cooperation (2019–2021) and acknowledgement of enhancement of maritime collaboration. An agreement

on increased participation in Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) to keep the sea lines of communication safe for development was also reached. IONS includes Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, France, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sudan, Somalia, South Africa and Tanzania, with Madagascar participating as an observer nation. The South African National Defence Force likewise participated in the First Multinational India–Africa Field Training Exercise (IAFTX) in 2019. South Africa also pledged to increase collaboration in different forums such as Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) so as to take forward the Blue Economy initiative. Meanwhile, India has been working to enhance bilateral ties as well, for instance, the INS Trishul was on a visit to Durban, South Africa, for the period 6–10 June 2023 to participate in a commemorative event marking 130 years since the start of the struggle against apartheid at Pietermaritzburg Railway Station, near Durban.²²

In addition, India also evolved the Strategic Cooperation Framework of Africa–India Forum Summit to forge better ties.²³ This provided a platform to discuss issues such as maritime security, counterterrorism, blue economy and climate change policy integration. This has enabled countries from the Global South to be able to work on agenda-setting and highlight their own priorities in a dynamic geopolitical environment. For example, the IOR is given top priority by the South Africa government, which has commonality with the Indian government's strategic objectives therefore providing opportunities for greater cooperation.²⁴

Henceforth, India hopes to increase collaboration with African countries through better exchange of knowledge related to best practices, thereby increasing cumulative capacity building. Capacity-building is likely to include training, transferral of naval equipment as well as intelligence sharing, logistical backing, combined military drill along with patrols, marine biotechnology research coordination, growth of listening stations and increased surveillance to monitor maritime transmissions, etc.²⁵

Indian Ambitions to Ascend as a Net Security Provider in Africa

As India emerges as a leader for the Global South, it aspires to take the principal strategic position in the IOR. Moreover, as India gains economic strength and increases its engagement in the WIOR, its increased stakes in the region naturally lead to greater interest in the stability of the region. India has likewise developed a desire to become a net security provider in the maritime domain to encourage peace, stability and prosperity, especially at a time when China threatens the interest of several countries in the region.²⁶

India has already taken up the mantle of net security for Seychelles as well as Mauritius. India has contributed defence equipment including patrol boats as well as Dornier-228 maritime reconnaissance aircraft to Seychelles. It has increased cooperation so as to supplement signals' intelligence proficiency, constructed airstrips for Indian armed personnel in Mauritius while conducting training for defence personnel including the Mauritian National Coast Guard. INS Tarkash, an Indian Navy warship, was recently sent to the Gulf of Guinea on the west coast of Africa, where it engaged in a joint maritime exercise alongside Nigerian Navy patrol ships NNS Kano, Osun, Sokoto and Nguru. This deployment marked India's involvement in the region, where it has been actively combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden near the east coast of Africa since 2008.²⁷

India has also been leveraging its naval experience to build better relations with other African countries. For instance, in Nigeria, a naval war college was built in collaboration with India, which is likely to prove important for future interaction.²⁸ Furthermore, India has been working on trilateral relations with the French, which has the potential to be transformed into critical relations to counter the Chinese influence.

In addition, the partnerships are strengthened by significant populations of ethnic Indian origin in both countries, wherein several cases they also hold powerful positions. Officers from the Indian armed forces also serve in high positions in the Mauritian navy and Mauritian Maritime Air Squadron (MAS). Indian officers have likewise held the positions of the Mauritian National Security Advisor and the Seychellean Maritime Security Advisor. There is thus a higher chance for a supportive and collaborative arrangement for 'maritime domain awareness',²⁹ which is in sync with India's ambition of being a net security provider for various countries.

Towards this end, India has already been making several efforts. For example, India has completed several important projects in the region such as the installation of radar systems in the coastal regions of Mauritius and Seychelles. This will help in enhancing the information-gathering capability of the National Command Control Communication Intelligence network of the Indian navy thereby assisting India in augmenting its capability.³⁰

India has similarly conducted trilateral exercises with South Africa and Brazil so as to increase its collaborative potential with other countries in the region.

In recent years, India and Africa have been strengthening their maritime collaborations. The Indian navy has emerged as a key security provider in the WIOR, offering timely humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. For instance,

during Cyclone Idai in Mozambique and Cyclone Diane in Madagascar, India provided medical aid and relief materials. The COVID-19 pandemic further showcased India's support to African nations through initiatives like 'Mission Sagar' and 'Vaccine Maitri,' where medical supplies and vaccines were provided. India aims to enhance its maritime presence and ties with African littoral countries such as Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, Seychelles, Madagascar and Mauritius, to secure the Sea Lanes of Communication. Radar surveillance facilities have been set up in Seychelles, Mauritius and Northern Madagascar to monitor ship movements and ensure regional security. Joint naval exercises, like the India–Mozambique–Tanzania Trilateral Exercise, also foster interoperability between India and African nations. Overall, India's engagement demonstrates its expertise as a first responder in times of crisis in Africa.³¹ Furthermore, Mauritius and Seychelles have participated in a naval arrangement undertaken by India along with the Maldives and Sri Lanka known as the 'IO-5', which is an Indian Ocean security arrangement. IO-5 is part of greater Indian aim to be a net security provider in the region. This is projected to lead to nominal Chinese control over western and central parts of the Indian Ocean.³²

Recognition of the need for stable and long-term bilateral relationships for the achievement of common goals

India and Africa have recognised their shared interests and challenges in the region and thus the need to work together. Countries such as Djibouti have emerged as strategic partners for India in the fight against violent non-state actors. India and African nations are strengthening their defence ties through the Africa–India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX) 2023 military exercise. The exercise involves army contingents from nine African countries and military observers from 11 others, showcasing India's efforts to deepen economic and strategic partnerships with Africa.³³

The Indian Ocean Region-Information Fusion Centre (IFC-IOR) in Gurugram and the Regional Coordination Operations Centre (RCOC) in Seychelles signed an MoU in February 2023, enhancing information sharing and maritime domain awareness in the IOR. Strengthening their watchful gaze, India established access to eight Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) Stations spread across Mauritius, with an impressive range of 50 kilometers, feeding essential information into the IF-IOR. The islands of Mauritius, from the main island to Rodrigues, Saint Brandon, and Agalega, stood fortified with five CSR systems each. Seychelles was provided six CSR for Assumption Island, Astove, Alphonse, Farquhar, and Mahe.³⁴

Similarly, India has been developing closer relations with both to confront crucial as well as shared. India has likewise been engaging with regional organisations including the African Union on the African continent in order to build long-term relations. India and the African Union have discussed increased cooperation in maritime security, counterterrorism and for mapping of the continental shelf.³⁵ This is particularly helpful as India can participate in areas and with countries that it doesn't have strong bilateral relationships with.

AREAS OF MARITIME SECURITY AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND AFRICA

India is working vigorously to increase security and strategic cooperation with African littoral states including Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania. Security concerns and activities such as infrastructural development assistance, defence equipment transfers and enhanced potential for technology cooperation including in hydrography, joint ventures in defence equipment software, digital defence and research development have provided convergence for vital relation building. Some of the important areas of maritime security and strategic cooperation between India and Africa are:

Anti-Piracy Operations

One of the flashpoints of piracy has been the Gulf of Guinea, which has transformed into a serious security problem in the maritime domain.³⁶ This is further exacerbated as the pirates are well organised with planned getaway procedures and are undertaking activities such as kidnapping for ransom. As pirates venture deeper into Southern and Western Indian Ocean, the situation becomes untenable for India, thus leading to greater cooperation with African nations affected with the same challenges.

To this end, the Indian Navy has conducted patrols in Mauritian maritime territorial waters to safeguard against piracy as well as in the Mozambique Channel. Furthermore, India has provided apparatus, gear and training for the African Union summit and the World Economic Forum to counter the problem of piracy effectively. To maintain better security, India has gifted interceptor boats and facilitated the procurement of highspeed interceptor boats for National Agency of Maritime Affairs (ANAM), an agency essential to the functioning of Comoros's National Maritime and

Port Policy. India has also signed an agreement with Mozambique to patrol against piracy in its territorial water.

Besides, India has systematically been looking for other ways of engagement to counter piracy such as through the Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave held at Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh where announcements were made regarding safeguarding SLOCs and averting, thwarting as well as safeguarding against criminal activities at sea, piracy and illegal fishing by increasing surveillance cooperation.³⁷

Additionally, India along with various organisations and multiple African countries including Djibouti, Egypt, Somalia, African Union and International Maritime Organisation are a part of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS). The CGPCS aims to facilitate sharing of information, situational awareness and to conduct anti-piracy patrols.³⁸ This has yielded results as piracy has gone down in the Somalian waters although there has been an incremental increase in piracy off the West African coast.

Naval Diplomacy

Naval diplomacy has been playing a key role in cementing maritime ties between India and African countries. Ships from the Indian navy have been increasingly making goodwill visits to ports situated at the east coast of Africa as well as in the African countries bordering the Indian Ocean Region. This has resulted in stimulating greater inter-operability as well as better interaction between Indian and African navies. Naval diplomacy has been instrumental in demonstrating the intent, focus and the significance that the African continent holds for India, which in return helps in developing credibility for future missions. In addition, high-level officials have also partaken in naval diplomacy for example, the earlier Naval Chief, Admiral R.K. Dhowan visited Kenya in 2014 to cement old ties while exploring ways to develop new ones.³⁹

Tarkash and Trikanand, Indian navy ships conducted goodwill visits to Angola, Egypt, Morocco Namibia and Senegal, which involved the exchange of knowledge regarding best practices in 2019.⁴⁰ Indian navy, similarly makes consistent harbour calls to Kenya including a three-day call by Indian Navy's First Training Squadron to Mombasa. Indian ships have likewise conducted goodwill visits to Antsiranana in Madagascar, one of Kenya's maritime neighbours.

The Indian navy is facilitating the construction of 'bridges of friendship', a transnational collaboration with approachable states. Indian pacific co-

existence as well as camaraderie with friendly nations such as Namibia are emphasised as well as.⁴¹ The navy is also provided with an opportunity to gauge the current maritime concerns around the world. Moreover, the Indian navy has collaborated with navies from Benin, Ghana and Nigeria to coordinate⁴² surveillance and essential aid in order to trace missing vessels. This has the potential to emerge as the basis for future anti-piracy operations, smoothed through naval diplomacy. INS Trishul, an Indian Navy frigate, made a port call at Mombasa, Kenya, as part of a 5-nation deployment to Africa, strengthening India–Africa ties. During the visit, personnel from Indian and Kenyan navy engaged in professional interactions, sports exchanges, and a joint yoga session. The ship also participated in a Maritime Partnership Exercise with Kenyan Navy Ship Jasiri. With a displacement of 3,700 tons and a length of 125 meters, INS Trishul carries a crew of 30 officers and 300 sailors and is equipped with advanced weapons and sensors, enhancing its capability to perform various roles. The visit aimed to foster cooperation and mutual understanding between the two countries.⁴³

Another avenue for naval diplomacy has been the International Fleet Review (IFR), which took place in Vishakhapatnam in 2016. Countries participating in the International Fleet Review included Djibouti, Egypt, Kenya, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania and Tunisia.⁴⁴ The IFR hoped to showcase Indian navy's initiative 'United through Oceans' to build better relationships between countries through engagement at multiple levels. IFR facilitated relation building, which further benefitted other naval enterprises including the semi-annual Milan exercises as well as the Indian Ocean Symposium (IONS). IFR likewise provided an opportunity for showcasing the indigenous efforts to build naval equipment for future procurement by various countries.⁴⁵

Another area evolving under the aegis of diplomacy has been 'paradiplomacy' where states act as an impetus of strategic partnerships through diplomacy with other countries. One such example is of Kerala, which was invited to a ministerial meeting level to Mauritius to discuss the blue economy.⁴⁶ The potential of 'paradiplomacy' is especially potent for littoral states of India as it gives more initiative to the states thereby expanding the prospects for cooperation.

As part of enhanced collaboration, India sold a 'water jet fast patrol vessel CGS Valiant and a CGS Barracuda'⁴⁷ to the National Coast Guard of Mauritius. India has likewise helped Mauritius in installing Automated Identification System as well as a Coastal Surveillance Radar System. Mauritius has purchased two 50 metres Fast Attack Craft (FACs) with Line

of Credit provided by an Indian bank. ‘Trident Project’ is undertaken by India with Mauritius as the lead actor so as to construct infrastructure and provide advanced repair facilities. Moreover, India has installed littoral radar surveillance in the Mauritian islands of Rodrigues and Saint Brandon. India is also involved in providing apparatuses as well as spares for maximum vehicle operationalisation at a subsidized value. Furthermore, India has provided Seychelles with INS Tarmugli, which is a fast-track vessel for its Coast Guard⁴⁸ and there is a Multi-Purpose Offshore Patrol Vessel (MPOPV) in the pipeline.

India also offers training to military officers in African countries. For example, officers from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania received training encompassing a scientific orientation phase, guided armament preliminary capsule, gear phase, which comprised of armament as well as sensor system training in addition to conflict gaming.⁴⁹ Moreover, officers from Benin, Mauritius as well as Nigeria completed Sub Lieutenant Technical Courses, which included training at multiple technical and specialised colleges of the Indian navy with the graduation ceremony being conducted at the Centre of Excellence in Ethics, Leadership and Behavioural Studies (CELABS).⁵⁰ Officers from Cameroon, Mauritius and Seychelles likewise completed a 25 Direct Entry Engineering Mechanic (DEME) course.⁵¹

Moreover, India has trained the Mauritian Special Mobile Force (SMF) as well as Mauritius Police Force Intervention Group (GIPM) through official visits wherein Indian Marine Commandos (MARCOS) in addition to the Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) squads provided training. Nation Coast Guard Divers have similarly been trained by the Indian armed naval forces. Results include better expertise and reliability while intimating powerful interpersonal connections. Similarly, Indian naval forces have also trained Malagasy navy cadre.⁵²

Egyptian naval personnel have, likewise, benefitted from training with Indian navy, which consisted of improving maritime safety, seafaring training, planning for the fortification of SLOCs, combat training alongside helicopters to reinforce better battle nautical formations and defensive training in case of non-traditional security maritime threats.⁵³

Cooperation for Better Preparedness and Response to Non-Traditional Threats

African leaders have understood the importance of maritime domain and are in the process to mould it as a priority. Initiatives such as christening the 2015–2025 decade as the ‘Decade of African Seas and Oceans’ as well

as declaring 25 July as the African Day of Seas and Oceans lend credence to their intent. This correspondingly punctuates the pragmatism on the part of African leaders as multiple threats are emerging in the maritime domain such as climate change,⁵⁴ polluted coastal waters, poaching, exploitation of underwater resources through loopholes in the legal system, human trafficking, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing, endangerment of maritime heritage, perilous disposal of nuclear waste, enhanced vulnerability of strategic communications as well as underutilisation and maintenance of navigational equipment.⁵⁵ This also requires continued recalibration of efforts at cooperation with different countries to enable innovative and sustainable solutions.⁵⁶

Moreover, blue economy has emerged as an area of convergence between the African countries and India. Blue economy is particularly important due to the future implications for both India and African countries as they grapple with the challenges of climate security. Africa possesses thirteen million square kilometres of maritime region while India possesses 2.4 million square kilometres, which drastically underscores the high stakes for both countries involved in maritime security.

Mauritius has emerged as the first country from the African landmass to construct a plan to achieve a blue economy. This is an extremely fortuitous development for India as there is an existing robust propinquity and consanguinity between India and Mauritius. South Africa has as well embarked to avail the benefits of a blue economy by launching Operation Phakisa. Kenya and Seychelles too have established inclusive strategies for the attainment of a blue economy, which is being referred to as the 'New Frontier of African Renaissance'.⁵⁷

Furthermore, India has introduced Security and Growth for All (SAGAR), which is anticipated to intensify maritime collaboration, enhance submarine protection through information sharing as well as restate the criticality of the maritime domain in Indian approach to security. Similarly, discussions have been held with countries such as Kenya, Mozambique and Tanzania for blue economy-based collaboration with ventures for modifying, adapting and financing initiatives.⁵⁸ India has handed over two additional Solas Marine fast interceptor boats to the Mozambican Navy during a port visit by the tank landing ship INS Kesari. The boats were part of India's Mission Sagar, aimed at providing COVID-19 related assistance to countries in the IOR.

The 16-meter fast interceptor craft are equipped with water-jet propulsion, have a top speed of 45 knots, and a range of 200 nautical miles at 12 knots. They are armed with machine guns and bullet-resistant cabins.

This delivery is part of India's efforts to promote international relations and counter growing Chinese influence in the region. In addition to this recent delivery, India had previously handed over patrol boats to Mozambique in 2019. Meanwhile, Ghana's Navy has received four new 40-meter Flex Fighter vessels to enhance maritime security and protect its domain. The vessels arrived from Singapore's Penguin Shipyard and will be based under the Western Naval Command at Sekondi until they are commissioned into service. The Flex Fighter vessels are fitted with all-around wheelhouse ballistic protection, machine gun mounts, and cabins for 12 security personnel. Ghana is also set to receive two 38-foot Defender class boats from the United States to aid in the fight against piracy and maritime crime. The country has been steadily building its naval strength by introducing new vessels and constructing a forward operating base.⁵⁹

India has invested in and organised Strategic Maritime Security and Blue Economy Course, which involve blue economy policy development as well as implementation at the International Peace Support Training Centre for African officials.⁶⁰ Moreover, India has entered into a partnership with Seychelles for the development of a blue economy demonstrating its commitment to the blue economy.⁶¹ India is likewise working to promote the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) with one of the reasons being to reduce its 'carbon footprint'⁶² thus cementing its assurance and working for the accomplishment of a blue-economy.

Increasing Need for Counterterrorism, Drug Trafficking and Gun-Running Operations

The Indian Defence Minister has emphasised the significance of cooperation to overcome crimes related to terrorism as well as piracy in countries such as Mozambique. A marked weakening in Somali piracy activities has occurred due to the various anti-piracy operations being conducted by groups such as CGPCS. Although, the resultant power vacuum is being filled by criminal organisations primarily from the oil-rich Niger delta, endangering India's energy security as it gets its hydrocarbon from Africa.

However, this has provided an opportunity for the Information Fusion Center-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) opened by India for the dissemination of information in maritime domain and to track small-arms trafficking and piracy. This can increase Indian influence while showcasing Indian expertise and initiative.

Moreover, weak government structure, deficiency in the operational ability of the local navies as well as the coast guards, rising unemployment

among the youth thereby increasing vulnerability to radicalisation, virtually unhindered access of violent non-state actors to the Gulf of Guinea and mounting insurgencies have led to an increase in the number of kidnappings, recurring theft of hydrocarbons, endemic corruption and unending protection money blackmail.⁶³ Simultaneously, maritime terrorism is being emboldened by ‘phantom ships,’ which fly ‘flags of convenience’ that make tracking problematic without comprehensive cooperation between nations. Another aspect is narco-terrorism, which services piracy operations, facilitates the usage of seas for transportation of terror-inducing tools as well as contributes to the instability of various government making naval cooperation difficult.⁶⁴

Conducting Hydrographic Surveys and Helping African Littoral Nations Develop Basic Capabilities in Hydrography

The Indian navy enjoys an advanced hydrographic division, which is comprised of eight ships accompanied with equipment well-suited for surveys, multiple naval crafts, an electronic chart manufacturing station as well a school specialising in hydrography, which is helpful in the training of multiple personnel from various navies across the globe.⁶⁵ India has mastered the indigenous production of catamaran hydrauligraphic survey vessel⁶⁶ and the Indian navy has conducted hydrography surveys with the Kenyan navy.

Moreover, India has provided Seychelles with ocean mapping technology so as to ease the enforcement and protection of its exclusive economic zone. India has also been conducting hydrographic surveys in Mauritius. Moreover, the first overseas visit undertaken by the Indian defence minister was to Mozambique where three memorandums of understandings were signed between India and Mozambique including related to cooperation in the surveying of Mozambique’s waters through hydrography.⁶⁷ India has likewise conducted hydrographic survey operations with Tanzania at the Dar-es-Salaam port. Henceforth, the importance of hydrography cannot be overstated as it is essential for the assertion of the continental shelf and ‘maritime boundary delineation’, which can be useful for the protection of territorial sovereignty, defence of SLOCs and ownership of finite natural resources.⁶⁸ As such, hydrography and hydrauligraphic survey collaborations have emerged as promising avenues of cooperation.

Trilateral Cooperation

The Indian Navy took part in Exercise Cutlass Express during both the 2021 and 2023 editions. This military exercise is organised by the US Naval Forces Africa and takes place in the East coast of Africa and the Gulf region. The

primary objective of the exercise is to enhance maritime security in the WIOR (WIOR) at both national and regional levels. Meanwhile, Indian Navy's Boeing P-8I and the French Navy's Falcon M50 have united their naval prowess, conducting three thrilling joint surveillance missions off Réunion Island and the Mozambique Channel in March, May and November 2022. Trilateral engagements are slated to provide India with more access, resources and expertise.⁶⁹

Collaborating with France on security matters in the region, India has deployed its P-8I submarine hunting aircraft to La Réunion Island, an overseas department of France. These efforts aim to maintain regional stability and counterbalance China's influence in the area. The Indian Navy's representation in the IBSAMAR VII exercise includes the Teg class guided missile frigate, INS Tarkash, a Chetak helicopter, and personnel from the Marine Commando Force (MARCOS). IBSAMAR is a collaborative naval exercise involving the navies of India, Brazil and South Africa.

During the harbour phase, they engage in professional exchanges involving damage control and fire-fighting drills, cross-boarding lectures, and interactions among special forces, enhancing their capabilities and cooperation. The Joint Maritime Exercise aims to strengthen maritime security, joint operational training, sharing of best practices and building interoperability to address common maritime threats. This active participation demonstrates the Indian navy's commitment not only in their region but also in other regions, showcasing their willingness to collaborate with other navies globally to promote peace, stability and security in international waters.⁷⁰

CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO ENHANCED SECURITY AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND AFRICA

The security of the maritime domain is vital for India and African countries as it facilitates sustained economic development and achievement of maritime objectives. Even though there is a palpable inclination on the part of both India and Africa for better cooperation, some substantial challenges stand in the way.

Skepticism about Indian Presence in the Region

For a substantial amount of time, African nations suffered from 'sea-blindness'⁷¹ and inward looking myopia. Africa with its strategic relevance, connectivity and access to resources has been grappling with vast resource exploitation by multinational corporations, neo-colonialism, sectarian

violence and terrorism with the result of being entrapped in a siege mentality. After centuries of exploitation by the colonial powers, the effects of which are still felt on the continent, Chinese and Indian involvement has been met with scepticism.

The Indian navy's role has been recognised to have the capacity to take the form of a constabulary navy, thereby implying the possibility of intervention in littoral nations for the common good.⁷² India, however, has been cautious about how its engagement in the region is perceived. Although, India has been boosting naval diplomacy with African countries, there is a reluctance to engage militarily due to the non-interference policy espoused by India.

The Difference in Maritime Security Priorities

It has been observed that India is inclined to work towards increasing maritime cooperation with African countries only when it suits Indian objectives of securing energy resources, in case of heightening Indian threat perception or for ensuring the safety of Indian vessels at sea. Feeble harmonisation and synchronisation of multiple maritime aspects such as patrols, protective measures taken to assure the security of exclusive economic zone, humanitarian aid and disaster relief operations, resource apportionment as well as counterterrorism operations showcase the low priority given for better cooperation. This is further exemplified in the government of India's insufficient disbursement of the budget to the Navy in contrast to the Chinese navy. Experts thus express the urgent need to appraise current priorities and to focus on its central proficiencies so as to facilitate the reappraised priorities.

Bounded by Narrow Parameters of Anti-Piracy Collaboration

India–Africa maritime security cooperation has been driven disproportionately by the anti-piracy focus, resulting in a paucity of attention to other areas. While the Indian Navy has conducted joint manoeuvres in the Gulf of Aden as well as the East African coast, efforts at capacity-building through institutions establishing measures for sustainability have not been undertaken to the extent of their calculative feasibility. Singular focus on anti-piracy operations has obfuscated other collaborative measures that could be taken by both India and Africa nations. These operations create a false perception that sufficient amount of cooperation is underway, thereby overlooking the scope for expansion towards greater security and surveillance due to the intense as well as unwavering concentration on anti-piracy undertakings.⁷³

India has the potential to assist African countries with plotting their continental shelf, in surveillance of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ)

besides securitisation to enable bio-tourism, in enhancing effective utilisation of renewable marine resources, surveying of marine resources as well as establishment of coastal diversity parks, blue economy and marine reserve areas.⁷⁴

No Comprehensive Long-Term Plan for Greater Cooperation

Multiple countries in Africa are dogged by governmental shortcomings, underfunding, corruption, unsatisfactory institutions as well as an undersized naval ecosystem. India, on the other hand, has been looking at collaboration on a case-by-case basis rather than composing a viable strategic plan of cooperation for the continent or the region at the very least. India has not taken the initiative to develop a comprehensive Pan-African agenda, and neither is India a part of regional organisations or institutions responsible for synchronizing maritime actions in the region. African countries likewise have not implemented the 2050 Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy with proper institutional integration for essential support and sustainability.

India has been advised by experts to send defence attaches such as the ones in the case of Madagascar, for maritime assistance and improved long-term cooperation. This would also help in the implementation of the Coastal Surveillance Radar (CSR) system to counter increasing Chinese influence, which is detrimental to India–Africa maritime security. Furthermore, India and France are currently collaborating on constructing a space-based Automatic Identification System (AIS) to trail vessels activities on an instantaneous basis. This has the potential to be utilised by African nations to better access information as well as for the augmentation of their decision-making capabilities. AIS can likewise act as an incentive for the African nations to cooperate with India on a long-term basis.⁷⁵

As the world witnesses the proliferation of kinetic energy armaments, unmanned autonomous vehicles operating on-underneath-and-above the sea, miniaturisation of weapons, militarisation of the seas and the steady enlargement of mature precision strike regimes in the maritime domain⁷⁶ the lack of a comprehensive plan for cooperation becomes starker for allies and adversaries alike.

CONCLUSION

India and African countries share historical ties as well as a colonial past, which provides a crucial common ground for sustained partnerships. As multilateralism corrodes, the partnership between India and African nations

is essential for shared prosperity. India, through participation in anti-piracy operations, securing critical sea lines of communication, supporting African nations with capability-building, partaking in multiparty drills, constructing listening stations, distributing defence equipment, research cooperation and providing officer training has situated itself to incrementally acquire an advantageous position in the maritime security and strategy domain in the 21st century. In addition, India has been projecting itself as the first responder in the IOR as it has undertaken various Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief missions including during cyclone Idai. Thus, assisting in paving the way for better cooperation through forging linkages and goodwill.

However, the scope to develop ties with countries in the African continent is immense. India needs to recognise new opportunities that arise and tap on effectively. African littoral states including the Vanilla Island countries are being acknowledged for their strategic significance as well as being resource rich. These countries are vying to better utilise their strategic importance by working with reliable and dynamic countries to enhance relations. India needs to recognise this and bolster ties with these countries.

In addition, there are several other challenges that need to be addressed as well to promote enhanced cooperation. These include inconsistent attempts to increase cooperation especially in maritime security and strategic arena, financial hindrances, scarcities in the number of appropriately skilled and qualified employees, etc. Other drawbacks such as weak regulation, weak enforcement structures, sustainability issues, inadequate infrastructure, limited command, control, and communications capabilities, insufficient supply of replacement parts, as well as unsatisfactory resources for maritime law enforcement (MLE) require focus and attention.

India recently held its first-ever trilateral naval exercise with Tanzania and Mozambique in the western Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa. This exercise follows the India–Africa Defence Dialogue during the DefExpo 2022 in Gujarat's Gandhinagar. India's maritime security strategy prioritises the southwest Indian Ocean and the Mozambique Channel due to significant Chinese investments in the region. Concerns have been raised that China's military base in Djibouti and its port investments could potentially serve military purposes. To counter China's growing presence, India seeks to strengthen defence ties with east African countries in the IOR. India plays a crucial role as a net security provider and has actively participated in humanitarian assistance/disaster relief missions in the IOR. To further bolster its presence, India is building military infrastructure on Mauritius' Agalega Island. Moreover, India has access to military facilities

of Japan, France and the US through logistics exchange agreements that could lead to trilateral cooperation. Stability and naval security can be achieved through a multipronged approach designed and implemented by India and African countries together. This could include an increased focus on naval cooperation, modernisation, resilience, sustainability through the development of multilateral security architecture for long-term joint naval prosperity.

APPENDIX

Tabular Representation of Port Visits and Defence Training of Indian Personnel with African Nations

Year	Country	Brief Description
2014	Kenya	Visit by Naval chief, Former Admiral R K Dhowan
2016	Mauritius	Mauritian Special Mobile Force (SMF) as well as Mauritius Police Force Intervention Group (GIPM) through official visits wherein Indian Marine Commandos (MARCOS). Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) squads Malagasy navy cadre and Nation Coast Guard Divers received training as well.
2019	Egypt	Egyptian naval personnel received from training with Indian navy. The training aimed to enhance maritime safety, seafaring skills, fortified SLOC planning, combat with helicopters for better naval formations, and defence against non-traditional maritime threats
2019	Tanzania	Hydrographic survey operations in Dar-es-Salaam port
2019	Kenya	Three-day call by Indian Navy's First Training Squadron to Mombasa
2019	Angola, Egypt, Morocco Namibia and Senegal	INS Tarkash and INS Trikand, Indian navy ships conducted goodwill visits, which involved the exchange of knowledge regarding best practices

2019	Antisiranana, Madagascar	Indian ships have likewise conducted goodwill visits
2020	Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania	Officers underwent training, including scientific orientation, armament and sensor system instruction, and conflict gaming
2022	Nigeria	INS Tarkash participated in exercise with joint maritime exercise alongside navy patrol ships, NNS Kano, Osun, Sokoto, and Nguru
2022	India, Brazil, South Africa	IBSAMAR VII exercise includes the Teg class guided missile frigate, INS Tarkash
2023	South Africa	INS Trishul on a visit for a commemorative event marking 130 years since the start of the struggle against apartheid at Pietermaritzburg Railway Station, near Durban
2023	Botswana, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Morocco, Niger, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Seychelles, Senegal, Sudan, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe	AFINDEX 2023 military exercise
2023	Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, South Africa, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles	INS Trishul and INS Sunayna made 16 port visits to eight African cities

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