

Viewpoint

INDIA-AFRICA DEFENCE COOPERATION INITIATIVES SINCE THE SECOND IADD

Following the Second India-Africa Defence Dialogue, India and Africa have deepened their defence cooperation through joint exercises, training programs, and defence industry partnerships. Key initiatives like AFINDEX and the India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave emphasize their commitment to regional security in the Indian Ocean Region. These collaborative efforts include port visits, maritime patrols, and disaster relief missions, aligned with India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative. The partnership aims to enhance military interoperability and address challenges such as logistical issues and political unrest, while countering Chinese influence in the region.

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Introduction

As the second India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) held alongside Defexpo 2022 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, marks its first anniversary, India and Africa have strengthened their defence and security cooperation. Their relationship is built on shared security challenges and mutual interests, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). India's initiatives like SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and its G20 presidency motto, "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" reflect its commitment to regional security and growth.

The Second IADD, held on 18 October 2022, focused on "Adopting Strategy for Synergizing and Strengthening Defence and Security Cooperation." During this event, Raksha Mantri

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Rajnath Singh hosted African Defence Ministers to discuss enhancing cooperation through increased training, capacity building, joint exercises, and humanitarian assistance. The past year has seen significant initiatives that have brought India and Africa closer, reinforcing their geopolitical relationship. Defence and security cooperation have become key pillars of this partnership through activities such as training, joint exercises, and defence industry collaborations.

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India-Africa Defence and Security Developments in 2023

On 28 March 2023, in Pune, Maharashtra, the first India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave was held in conjunction with the second Africa-India Joint Exercise, or "AFINDEX".¹ The Chief of Staff of the Army, General Manoj Pande, and chiefs and representatives of thirty-one African nations attended the conclave. The conclave was structured around the theme - 'Africa-India Militaries for Regional Unity- AMRUT'.² The Conclave's main objectives were to develop an institutionalised framework for improved cooperation between the countries in the areas of combined military training and peacekeeping operations, as well as to support India's defence industry in the region. The first edition of the conclave was held in March 2019 at Aundh Military Station, Pune. Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh while addressing the delegates of the 2023 defence conclave, emphasised that close cooperation in the areas of hydrography, counter-terrorism initiatives, capability development and capacity-building efforts, and maritime security is pivotal to the close working of the two regions. There was also a display of "Made in India" designs and indigenous industry weapons to promote defence exports to partner countries in Africa. Army chiefs and their representatives from the invited nations were also participants in the "Equipment Display" [...] organized in which 75 indigenous products from 32 industries manufactured under 'Make in India' were showcased".³

The ten-day AFINDEX exercise is aimed at enhancing interoperability between India and its partner countries in the region "from 23 African nations including Ethiopia, Egypt, Kenya, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, and South Africa, among others. The focus of the exercises was "Humanitarian Mine Action and Peacekeeping Operations under the UN mandate".⁴ Such continued engagement also signals India's continued commitment to development, growth and also at countering the Chinese influence in the area (such as the overseas military base in Djibouti in the Horn of Africa). Apart from this, many other collaborative defence initiatives have been covered in the current year, such as military exercises, maritime domain awareness (MDA) initiatives, and bilateral visits of senior defence representatives from the region. In addition, a plethora of additional cooperative defence projects have been discussed this year centred on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, and non-traditional security concerns. India has additionally contributed to Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) efforts during Cyclone Idai in Mozambique in 2019. The collaboration also encompasses regional associations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), wherein India has assisted its African counterparts in hydrographic studies and COVID-19 relief operations. Additionally, the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) is also a key initiative to enhance maritime domain awareness in the IOR.

The tables below depict the progress in the India-Africa defence cooperation in 2023 through different collaborative exercises such as HADR exercises and joint anti-piracy exercises.

Table 1- India-Africa Defence Cooperation

| Date | Events | Participants |
|--------------------|--|-------------------|
| | India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave ⁵ | 31 African states |
| 20-23 March 2023 | First Training Squadron (1TS) of the Indian Navy ⁶ | Madagascar |
| 21-23 June 2023 | Visit of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (DCNS) to Kenya ⁷ | India-Kenya |
| 29 August 2023 | Visit of Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Defence ⁸ | India-Kenya |
| 2-5 October 2023 | Visit of Chief of Army Staff to Tanzania ⁹ | Tanzania |
| 15-22 October 2023 | Visit of Permanent Secretary, Zambian Defence Ministry ¹⁰ | Zambia |
| 29 November 2023 | MAHASAGAR - Indian Navy's outreach initiative ¹¹ | IOR littorals |

Source: Compiled by the author from PIB

Table 2- Press Information Bureau. India-Africa Military Exercises 2023

| Date | Participants | Nature of Exercise |
|--------------------------------|--|---|
| 14-28 January 2023 | Indo-Egypt Joint Training Exercise (Army) | Exercise Cyclone ¹² |
| 5-9 March 2023 | India, Bahrain, Japan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK and USA | International Maritime Exercise/Cutlass Express2023 (IMX/CE-23) ¹³ |
| 16-29 March 2023 | 25 States | AFINDEX ¹⁴ |
| 10-12 July 2023 | Combined Maritime Forces | Op Southern Readiness 2023- INS Sunayana ¹⁵ |
| 31 August to 14 September 2023 | 34 States | Exercise Bright Star ¹⁶ |
| 2-13 October 2023 | South Africa | Operational Sea Training and Safety Audit of SAS Mendi ¹⁷ |

Source: Compiled by the author from PIB

Military Interactions and Exercises across the Region

The Indian Navy in its overseas deployment operations has been conducting a number of port-calls through certain key ships. The practices showcase its commitment to ensuring a secure and stable IOR and promoting SAGAR in the region. In the context of mission deployments to the African continent, INS Sujata had completed its deployment when it made a port call to Port Maputo in Mozambique from 19 to 21 March 2023.¹⁸ Subsequently, the INS Trishul began an overseas deployment to the East Coast of Africa, visiting five countries along the way, including Mombasa, Kenya, Anjouan Comoros and Durban.¹⁹ INS Sumedha²⁰ on an Extended Operational Deployment also participated in the Indian Navy's second deployment to the anti-piracy patrol in the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) patrol, with INS Tarkash having participated in the first GoG patrol in October 2022.²¹

Most recently, it carried out Operation Kaveri, which was designed to evacuate Indian diaspora members from war-torn Sudan in April 2023. The ship also undertook a Maritime Partnership Exercise (MPX) in the region, comprising joint training and practical demonstrations over a spectrum of maritime topics to bolster maritime security and strengthen coordination.²²

From 20 to 23 March 2023, Port Antsiranana, Madagascar, was visited by the Indian Navy's First Training Squadron (1TS) ships, INS Tir and ICGS Sarathi, as part of a long-range training exercise.²³ Likewise, INS Sunayana took part in the Combined Maritime Forces' (CMF) Operation Southern Readiness 2023, which was a multinational endeavour aimed at boosting maritime security and combating piracy to maintain safety and freedom of navigation in the region. The exercise was intended to fortify multilateral connections and enhance collaboration. It coincided with Vice Admiral Sanjay Mahindru's, India's Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, visit to Kenya on an invitation from the Kenya Defence Forces.²⁴ A high-level virtual outreach program by the Indian Navy with the heads of the navies of certain Indian Ocean littoral states was also held on 29 November 2023.²⁵ With a focus on exchanging professional skills and enhancing Special Forces interoperability in desert environment while conducting counterterrorism, reconnaissance, raids, and other special operations, the exercise sought to strengthen defence cooperation between the two countries.

Defence Industrial Cooperation

As demand for Indian defence equipment increases throughout the continent, there is an growing willingness in Africa to engage in defence exports with India. India closely collaborates on defence cooperation with East African nations in order to bolster its access to resources and maritime security posture, given its strategic location. According to a recent India Exim Bank report, Mauritius, Mozambique, and Seychelles have been the main recipients of Indian weapons from 2017 to 2021. India has emerged as a leading defence exporter, accounting for about 15 per cent of all exports, as it works towards meeting Africa's

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needs in the maritime, aerospace, and defence sectors.²⁶ There has been interest in extending LoCs to partner African states to cover defence exports during the 18th India-Africa Conclave, which was hosted by the India Export Import (EXIM) Bank in collaboration with India's foreign and trade ministries, in June 2023.

A USD one billion defence partnership agreement between India and Nigeria has been authorised, with the goal of enabling the Defence Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) to become 40 per cent self-sufficient in the production of military hardware by 2027.²⁷ President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania paid India a four-day visit from 8–11 October 2023, during

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which both countries elevated their bilateral relations to the level of strategic partners. In addition, a five-year plan for enhancing defence cooperation was agreed upon by both nations. The deployment of the Indian Military Training Team in Tanzania, the enlargement of the area of defence cooperation, and the triumph of Indian defence businesses' Defence Expos in Dar es Salaam are noteworthy accomplishments. Agreements to strengthen cooperation in the Indian Ocean region resulted from their emphasis on the common concerns of maritime security. India's hydrographic

surveys of Tanzanian ports and bilateral maritime drills, including exclusive economic zone surveillance, were lauded by both parties. The presidents also praised the signing of the Technical Agreement on exchanging White Shipping Information and emphasised the significance of increasing interoperability between their military forces. In the context of the Blue Economy, they also indicated a desire to collaborate.²⁸

2023 also saw close cooperation between India and Kenya in terms of agreeing on a joint cooperation agreement on maritime cooperation named 'Bahari', meaning 'ocean' in Swahili.²⁹ The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by Goa Shipyard Ltd. and Kenya Shipyard Ltd. was also mentioned in the joint statement. This agreement aims to facilitate profitable business partnerships and encourage Kenya's efforts to build up its

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shipbuilding, maintenance, and repair capabilities. The main elements of the vision included boosting maritime trade and industry, advancing maritime security, harnessing the Blue Economy potential, accelerating connectivity, reinforcing capacity development, and improving information sharing. The agreement involved various areas of cooperation, including defence industry collaboration, joint exercises, disaster relief efforts, drug trafficking, and addressing piracy in the Indian Ocean.³⁰ Furthermore, the IADD 2022 had proposed the setting up of the India-Africa Security Fellowship Programme at the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence and Strategic Analyses

(MP-IDSA), to encourage further research of security issues through the offer of fellowships to experts from African countries.

Way Ahead

After the Second India-Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) in 2022 and the AFINDEX in March 2023, the geopolitical ties between the two regions—known as the “global south”—have strengthened in the year that has passed. This has been demonstrated by initiatives like joint military exercises, defence industry partnerships, and capacity-building programmes. The story emphasises India’s dedication to the SAGAR initiative (Security and Growth for All in the Region), which focuses on the Indian Ocean. The programmes also cover portvisits, naval deployments, and defence industry collaboration, demonstrating the variety of approaches India uses to deepen defence and security ties with African countries. There are still difficulties, nevertheless, mainly about political unrest, logistics, and supply of resources. Despite these obstacles, both parties are dedicated to fortifying their defence cooperation in the upcoming years.

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² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Livemint, “India and Africa hold First Army Chiefs’ Conclave”, 28 March 2023, at <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/india-and-africa-hold-first-army-chiefs-conclave-11680002747376.html> (Accessed 23 December 2023)

⁵ Press Information Bureau, See No. 8.

⁶ Press Information Bureau, “The Ships of First Training Squadron Visit Antsiranana, Madagascar”, Ministry of Defence, 25 March 2023, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1910751> (Accessed 23 December 2023).

⁷ Indian Navy, “Visit of Deputy Chief of Naval Staff (DCNS) to Kenya (21 - 23 Jun 2023)”, at <https://indiannavy.nic.in/content/visit-deputy-chief-naval-staff-dcns-kenya-21-%E2%80%93-23-jun-2023-0#:~:text=VAdm%20Sanjay%20Mahindru%2C%20DCNS%20is,DCNS%20called%20on%20H.E.> (Accessed 23 December 2023).

⁸ Press Information Bureau, “Raksha Mantri & Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Defence discuss capacity building & defence industry cooperation during talks in New Delhi”, Ministry of Defence, 29 August 2023 at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1953231#:~:text=Raksha%20Mantri%20Shri%20Rajnat%20Singh,the%20India%20Kenya%20defence%20partnership> (Accessed 25 December 2023).

⁹ Press Information Bureau, “Chief of Army Staff of Indian Army to Strengthen Defence Cooperation With Visit to Tanzania”, Ministry of Defence, 2 October 2023, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1963166#:~:text=General%20Manoj%20Pande%2C%20Chief%20of,ties%20between%20the%20two%20countries> (Accessed 25 December 2023).

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- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Press Information Bureau, "PARTICIPATION OF INS TRIKAND IN INTERNATIONAL MARITIME EXERCISE/CUTLASS EXPRESS 23", Ministry of Defence, 10 March 2023, at <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1905563> (Accessed 29 December 2023).
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