

AFRICA DIGEST

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- India Maritime Engagement with Africa: AIKEYME 2025 and IOS SAGAR Initiative
- Macron's Island Tour: Reinvigorating France's Indian Ocean Diplomacy
- Forging Peace: Rwanda–DR Congo Accord Signals a New Chapter
- Zelensky in South Africa: A Bid for Peace and Influence
- Sudan's War: No End in Sight

India Maritime Engagement with Africa: AIKEYME 2025 and IOS SAGAR Initiative

India is reinforcing its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and strengthening ties with African nations through major naval initiatives amid growing geopolitical competition, maritime insecurity, and China's expanding footprint in the IOR and Africa. Two flagship efforts - the [Africa India Key Maritime Engagement \(AIKEYME\) 2025](#) and the [Indian Ocean Ship \(IOS\) SAGAR](#) - deployment highlight India's evolving approach to maritime diplomacy and regional security.

AIKEYME 2025 marks India's first large-scale, multilateral maritime exercise with African nations. Scheduled from 13 to 18 April 2025 and co-hosted with Tanzania, the exercise featured the participation of 10 countries including Comoros, Djibouti, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, and the co-hosts India and Tanzania. The exercise was conducted in two phases: a harbour phase at Dar-es-Salaam and a sea phase in the adjacent waters. The initiative aimed to enhance interoperability, build maritime security capacity, and promote joint responses to regional threats such as piracy, trafficking, and natural disasters.

The harbour phase involved various command-level interactions, tabletop exercises focused on anti-piracy operations and information sharing, as well as training in seamanship and Visit Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) procedures. Cultural and goodwill activities like yoga sessions and sports events reflected India's soft power

engagement. The sea phase involved tactical drills including small arms firing, helicopter operations, and search and rescue exercises which are critical skills for countering asymmetric maritime threats.

Simultaneously, India launched another important initiative under the IOS SAGAR banner. From 5 April to 8 May 2025, the offshore patrol vessel INS Sunayna operated in the Southwest Indian Ocean with a composite crew that involved naval personnel from nine friendly African nations Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, and South Africa. This deployment involves port visits to Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), Nacala (Mozambique), Port Louis (Mauritius), Port Victoria (Seychelles), and Male (Maldives), along with joint surveillance missions in the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) of Tanzania, Mozambique, Mauritius, and Seychelles.

The IOS SAGAR initiative is part of India's broader vision for [Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions \(MAHASAGAR\)](#), as outlined by the Prime Minister. It seeks to position India as a reliable maritime security partner and first responder in the Indian Ocean, especially at a time when the region is under pressure from piracy resurgence, Houthi threats to global shipping lanes, and increased Chinese naval activity.

The Indian Navy's proactive strategy reflects a shift from transactional engagements to deeper, sustained partnerships with African littorals. Over the past decade, India has increasingly focused

on collaborative naval exercises, coordinated patrols, and capacity-building measures across the IOR. The AIKEYME and IOS SAGAR programmes elevate this engagement to a new level by integrating training, joint operations, and strategic dialogue. Through sustained naval cooperation, India is laying the foundation for a robust and resilient security architecture in the Indian Ocean one that is inclusive, collaborative, and rooted in shared regional interests.

Macron's Island Tour: Reinventing France's Indian Ocean Diplomacy

France's renewed focus on the Indian Ocean underscores its ambitions to remain a key stakeholder in the evolving Indo-Pacific landscape. President Emmanuel Macron's tour of Mayotte, La Réunion, and Madagascar in April 2025 was a calculated move to reaffirm Paris's status as a resident power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and to deepen France's regional footprint, both diplomatically and militarily. The tour emphasised the interconnected nature of France's overseas governance challenges, strategic interests, and efforts at regional integration.

France retains sovereignty over Mayotte and La Réunion, as well as smaller territories such as the Scattered Islands. Together, these territories contribute significantly to France's global EEZ, granting it maritime control over resource-rich waters like the Mozambique Channel. France also operates military installations in Djibouti, UAE, and maintains 3,700 troops across the region. These assets anchor France's Indo-Pacific strategy and

provide security against emerging threats including piracy, terrorism, and geopolitical competition from China and others.

However, France's regional ambitions face considerable strain due to local crises and unresolved territorial disputes. Both Mayotte and La Réunion have recently endured natural disasters Cyclone Chido and Cyclone Garance respectively resulting in substantial humanitarian and infrastructural damage. Mayotte, in particular, struggles with high levels of undocumented migration from the Comoros, which contributes to social unrest, strained services, and intercommunal tension. These issues not only complicate domestic governance but also weakens France's image as a responsible and stable power in the region.

Diplomatically, Macron's participation in the fifth Indian Ocean Commission (IOC) summit, held on 24 April 2025 in Madagascar, reflected an intent to reposition France as a collaborative actor within a multilateral framework. The IOC, composed of Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Comoros, and France (via La Réunion), offers a platform to address regional concerns such as food security, maritime safety, climate resilience, and public health. France is the largest contributor to the IOC, backing initiatives from sustainable fisheries to disaster response.

However, territorial frictions continue to limit Paris's aspirations. Comoros [contests France's sovereignty over Mayotte](#), while Madagascar and Mauritius dispute French control of the Scattered Islands and Tromelin. These disagreements, supported

by resolutions from the African Union and United Nations, hinder France's ability to drive consensus within the IOC. Macron's push for Mayotte's formal inclusion in the IOC faced stiff opposition, particularly from Comoros, which wields veto power under the bloc's unanimity rule.

Despite these hurdles, France remains committed to enhancing the IOC's relevance. Joint military exercises such as Tulipe 2025, hosted by the French forces in La Réunion, reflect efforts to build trust and interoperability among member states. Macron's tour, although constrained by global events, reaffirmed France's commitment to safeguarding its interests in the IOR while navigating complex regional dynamics.

Rwanda–DR Congo Accord Signals a New Chapter

The recent agreement signed between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) marks a potential turning point in the long-standing crisis in eastern Congo. Brokered by the United States, the [accord](#) signifies a renewed diplomatic effort to de-escalate tensions and foster regional stability. The two nations pledged to respect each other's sovereignty and to produce a draft peace agreement by May 2 2025. This development is particularly noteworthy given the historically strained relations and ongoing violence that have defined their interactions in recent years.

The conflict in eastern DRC has escalated significantly since January 2025, following a major offensive by the M23 rebel group, widely believed to be supported by Rwanda. The offensive resulted in the seizure of Goma and Bukavu, the two

largest cities in eastern Congo, leading to massive displacement and the deaths of approximately 7,000 people. Despite international pressure and denials from Kigali, evidence presented by the UN and the US points toward alleged Rwandan involvement in bolstering M23's military capabilities.

The peace declaration, signed by the foreign ministers of both countries and witnessed by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, outlines several principles: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, recognition of legitimate security concerns in the border regions, support for the return of displaced populations, endorsement of the UN peacekeeping mission MONUSCO, and a commitment to regional economic integration. A joint security coordination mechanism is also under consideration to combat armed groups and illicit networks destabilizing the region.

While hostilities have continued in parts of North Kivu, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to an immediate cessation of violence and the rejection of hate speech and intimidation. Notably, recent discussions in Doha involving both the DRC government and M23 signalled a willingness to work toward a permanent ceasefire, indicating a coordinated international push for peace led by both Qatar and the United States.

The US has played a crucial role in this evolving dynamic, not only as a mediator but also as an economic stakeholder. Washington has initiated [negotiations](#) with the DRC over access to strategic minerals like cobalt, tantalum, and lithium, resources

which are essential for modern technologies but are largely dominated by Chinese companies. In exchange for its diplomatic and security support, the US seeks to secure reliable mineral supply chains through partnerships with both public institutions and private enterprises. Rwanda has also expressed interest in similar discussions, signalling a broader economic dimension to the emerging regional peace efforts.

The potential revitalization of the [Lobito Corridor](#), a key transcontinental infrastructure project linking mineral-rich areas of the DRC and Zambia to the Angolan coast further underscores the strategic value of peace in the region. A stable eastern Congo could transform the Great Lakes region into a hub for responsible investment and sustainable development. While challenges persist, the Washington agreement is a cautious but significant step toward peace, integration, and prosperity, not only for the DRC and Rwanda but for the broader region and its international partners.

Zelensky in South Africa: A Bid for Peace and Influence

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's visit to South Africa marked a critical moment in Kyiv's evolving foreign policy and its bid to deepen diplomatic and economic ties across Africa. This was the first visit by a Ukrainian head of state to South Africa in over three decades. The visit had clear strategic objectives - strengthen bilateral relations, seek African support for Ukraine's peace plan, and broaden international legitimacy amid waning Western unity.

Zelensky's [visit](#) came at a time when Ukraine faces mounting military and diplomatic pressure. With the conflict against Russia entering its third year and Ukraine's relationship with the U.S. its principal arms supplier under strain following President Donald Trump's return to office, Kyiv is increasingly looking beyond traditional allies. Africa, with its 54 votes in the UN General Assembly and growing geopolitical relevance, is central to that pivot.

The visit had multiple layers of significance. First, Zelensky aimed to rally support for a comprehensive and unconditional ceasefire with Russia. He used the opportunity to emphasize Ukraine's willingness to negotiate, provided Russia halts its military aggression. Second, Zelensky sought backing for Ukraine's efforts to repatriate thousands of children abducted to Russia during the war. South Africa, already a co-lead in a global coalition to return Ukrainian children, was seen as a vital partner in this humanitarian campaign.

Third, the trip was about countering Russia's entrenched influence on the continent. Moscow has longstanding ties with many African states, including South Africa. Zelensky's presence in Pretoria signalled that Ukraine, too, is ready to engage meaningfully, not merely in wartime appeals but through long-term cooperation. "We are not seeking exclusivity," Zelensky said, "we are seeking partnership."

Despite the visit being cut short due to a deadly Russian missile strike on Kyiv, it

generated significant diplomatic capital. President Cyril Ramaphosa welcomed Zelensky with warmth and emphasised South Africa's commitment to neutrality, dialogue, and peacebuilding. The two leaders reaffirmed their countries' shared values freedom, independence, and respect for international law and agreed to strengthen cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, agriculture, and infrastructure.

Zelensky's timing was deliberate. South Africa currently holds the G20 presidency, and Kyiv hopes Ramaphosa can influence the agenda to reflect Ukrainian interests. Moreover, the visit allowed Ramaphosa to reinforce South Africa's credibility as a neutral mediator. He had held phone calls with both Trump and Putin ahead of the meeting and confirmed his commitment to supporting any multilateral effort to end the war.

For Zelensky, this visit was about more than diplomacy. It was an assertion that Ukraine is a global actor, not confined to Europe's borders. For South Africa, it was a delicate balancing act deepening ties with Ukraine while managing longstanding relations with Russia and the U.S. If successful, the visit could mark a turning point in Ukraine-Africa relations, advancing Kyiv's search for peace, partnerships, and global solidarity.

Sudan's Spiralling Crisis: War, Famine, Displacement, and International Legal Fallout

As Sudan's civil war grinds into its third year, the country is plunging deeper into

what UN investigators describe as one of the [darkest chapters in its history](#). The conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023, has transformed into a catastrophic humanitarian crisis, displacing over 12.4 million people and killing tens of thousands. Alarmingly, a recent massacre in North Darfur's Zamzam and Abu Shouk displacement camps, claiming over 100 lives including children and aid workers, has spotlighted the escalating brutality.

The UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission (IFFM) condemned these ethnically motivated attacks and warned of intensifying hate speech, reprisals, and the growing risk of famine in besieged regions. Humanitarian access remains almost non-existent in key areas like Zamzam, where over [750,000 internally displaced persons](#) are trapped with no food, water, or medical supplies. Children are dying of hunger, and nearly all health facilities have been destroyed or overrun.

The situation is similarly grim in other parts of Sudan. As SAF regains territory in states like Sennar and Al-Jazirah, there are disturbing reports of mass arrests, public executions, and disappearances. The UN has reiterated that attacks on civilians, aid workers, and healthcare providers violate international law, calling for urgent accountability and sustained humanitarian access.

The regional implications of the Sudanese conflict are equally severe. More than 3.8 million people have fled to neighbouring

countries, making Sudan the site of the world's largest displacement crisis. Chad and Egypt host the largest numbers, with over 700,000 and 600,000 Sudanese refugees, respectively. These countries, already struggling with fragile infrastructure, are buckling under the pressure. Healthcare systems are being overwhelmed and education for refugee children is being suspended due to lack of funds.

Meanwhile, the WHO warns of an impending "perfect storm," with disease outbreaks rampant in overcrowded camps lacking sanitation and vaccinations. Border insecurity has risen sharply as weapons and armed groups proliferate, further destabilising already volatile regions. Sexual violence has emerged as a horrifying feature of this war. Women and children especially girls are at heightened risk both within Sudan and in displacement settings. UNICEF has reported shocking cases of rape, with victims including toddlers and young boys, adding a brutal layer to the humanitarian tragedy.

The Sudanese Government is now seeking international legal redress. In April 2025, it [initiated proceedings](#) against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the International Court of Justice (ICJ), accusing it of complicity in genocide against the Masalit ethnic group in West Darfur. The case alleges that the UAE provided direct financial, military, and political support to the RSF. Sudan is requesting urgent provisional measures to halt further atrocities and prevent escalation.

Without swift international action and funding estimated at [US\\$1.8 billion](#) for regional humanitarian response millions in Sudan and neighbouring states face famine, disease, and prolonged insecurity. As the war continues unchecked, the global community confronts a growing moral and legal imperative to intervene in Sudan.