

AFRICA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from Africa

June 2025



- Rwanda–DR Congo Peace Deal Raises Hope and Questions
- China Extends Tariff-Free Access to 53 African Nations
- India's All-Women Naval Mission and Regional Maritime Outreach
- Africa Corps and the Strategic Rebranding of Russian Influence
- From Johannesburg to Antananarivo: India Builds Bridges in Africa

Rwanda–DR Congo Peace Deal Raises Hope and Questions

In a high-profile [ceremony](#) held in Washington D.C., Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) signed a landmark peace agreement aiming to end over three decades of violent conflict in eastern Congo. Brokered by the United States and Qatar, the agreement marks a moment of diplomatic triumph, with U.S. President Donald Trump hailing it as a “glorious triumph” and a “generational victory.”

The deal, [signed](#) by Foreign Ministers Olivier Nduhugirehe of Rwanda and Thérèse Wagner of the DRC at the U.S. State Department, calls for the “disengagement, disarmament, and conditional integration” of armed groups operating in eastern DRC. Central to the agreement is the creation of a standing joint security coordination mechanism, the neutralisation of the FDLR (Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), and a phased disengagement of Rwandan troops, although the semantics still remain vague.

For the U.S., the accord not only signals a diplomatic breakthrough but also provides potential strategic access to DRC’s vast mineral wealth, including coltan, cobalt, and lithium critical to global electronics and green energy industries. [Trump](#) confirmed that the U.S. had secured “a lot of the mineral rights,” framing it as a win for American economic interests. Secretary of State [Marco Rubio](#), who witnessed the signing, acknowledged that while the agreement is a major step forward, “there’s still work to be done.” He emphasised that peace is not only about ending conflict but enabling people to live with dignity, prosperity, and stability. The deal also

promises regional economic integration, with Kigali and Kinshasa committing to launch a joint framework within 90 days.

The road to this accord was neither swift nor smooth. Earlier this year, the M23 rebel group widely believed to be backed by Rwanda captured large swathes of eastern DRC, including the strategic cities of Goma and Bukavu. Thousands were killed and nearly a million displaced. Despite Kigali’s repeated denials, United Nations experts and Congolese authorities accused Rwanda of allegedly using the group to control lucrative mining regions.

Qatar played a vital mediating role, hosting secret back-channel talks and a high-level meeting between Presidents Paul Kagame and Félix Tshisekedi in Doha. The African Union, under the leadership of Togo’s President Faure Gnassingbé, also facilitated negotiations through the Luanda Process. Prior efforts such as Angola’s mediation in 2023 had faltered due to lack of implementation and mutual trust.

While the deal has been celebrated diplomatically, criticism has emerged from civil society. Nobel Laureate Denis Mukwege called the agreement “opaque” and accused it of rewarding aggression while failing to provide justice or reparations for victims of violence and exploitation.

Key details remain [undisclosed](#). Will M23 withdraw from occupied areas? Will the FDLR be effectively neutralised? And will Rwanda truly pull back its estimated 7,000 troops from Congolese soil? These unanswered questions highlight the fragility of the agreement. As Trump eyes legacy-defining foreign policy achievements and as both Rwanda and the

DRC face intense international scrutiny, the fate of this accord rests not in its rhetoric but in its rigorous, transparent, and verifiable implementation.

China Extends Tariff-Free Access to 53 African Nations

China's recent announcement to eliminate [tariffs](#) on imports from 53 African countries marks a calculated economic and geopolitical move at a time when the United States is retreating into protectionism. With the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) set to expire in September 2025 and the Trump administration imposing new tariffs on several African nations, Beijing is seizing an opportunity to reshape trade ties and influence on the continent. While China has long been Africa's largest trading partner, the new tariff-free access excluding only Eswatini due to its diplomatic recognition of Taiwan, signals an intent to integrate African economies more deeply into Chinese-centered supply chains and extend Beijing's global leverage.

[Trade](#) between China and Africa stood at US \$296 billion in 2024, but the balance is skewed heavily in favour of China. Beijing exported US \$179 billion worth of goods to Africa while importing only US \$117 billion in return, mostly in raw materials like oil, copper, and cobalt. Although China had previously offered zero tariffs to 33 least-developed African countries, this expanded initiative includes major economies such as Nigeria and South Africa and suggests a long-term vision of consolidating the African continent as a source of strategic resources and a future hub for Chinese-backed manufacturing.

The United States, by contrast, risks alienating [African](#) partners. Tariffs of 50% on Lesotho, 30% on South Africa, and 14% on Nigeria have been temporarily paused but continue to cause concern. The uncertain future of AGOA has left African exporters in limbo, with many now considering alternatives in Asian markets or through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Several African governments are scrambling to maintain ties with Washington, offering packages that include access for U.S. companies like Starlink, new mining deals in critical minerals, and even agreements to accept deported migrants. Yet such offers often appear transactional, lacking a long-term vision for equitable trade and development.

While Beijing's policy shift has been praised as a "political masterstroke," its practical impact remains uncertain. Many African exporters still face formidable barriers beyond tariffs, including logistical bottlenecks, red tape, and strict Chinese sanitary [regulations](#). As some analysts noted, it is African companies not Chinese generosity that must step up to seize the opportunity. Countries like South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Morocco are best positioned to benefit, given their relative industrial capacity and export readiness. The potential exists for others, too, if regional supply chains can integrate less advanced economies into the broader export ecosystem.

Ultimately, this is not just an economic manoeuvre; it is a contest over influence. While U.S. trade policy under Trump has been marred by inconsistency and short-termism, China is presenting itself as a

steady, long-term partner, even if driven by self-interest. Africa stands at a strategic crossroads caught between tariff walls and zero-duty promises. The outcome will depend not only on the policies of Beijing and Washington but also on the ability of African governments to negotiate smartly, invest in infrastructure, and pursue industrial policies that move them beyond raw material dependence.

India's All-Women Naval Mission and Regional Maritime Outreach

India's maritime engagement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) witnessed a series of impactful developments in June 2025, reinforcing its strategic posture as a security provider, regional partner, and advocate of inclusive maritime cooperation. A landmark achievement came on June 4, 2025 with the successful return of the Tri-Services All-Women Sailing [Expedition](#) Team to Mumbai. Sailing aboard the indigenously designed yacht *INS Triveni*, the 11-member crew comprising six Army officers, one Navy officer, and four Air Force officers completed a challenging 1,800-nautical-mile voyage to Seychelles.

This two-month international mission, the first of its kind, demonstrated not only the operational resilience and leadership of Indian women in uniform but also the growing gender inclusivity within India's defence forces. Beyond its symbolic significance, the expedition also enhanced maritime diplomacy, with port engagements and defence-level interactions with Seychelles which further deepened bilateral ties.

India's operational footprint in the region was further evident through the visit of [INS](#)

[Teg](#), a stealth frigate of the Western Naval Command, to Port Louis, Mauritius. The deployment underscored India's continued support for maritime security in the Indian Ocean, particularly in countering Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Joint surveillance operations were conducted in Mauritius' Exclusive Economic Zone in coordination with the Mauritius National Coast Guard (NCG), highlighting a shared commitment to regional maritime governance.

The visit focused on capacity-building efforts. Indian Navy personnel conducted practical training for NCG officers in key areas including damage control, firefighting, and engine room management. In a gesture of technical cooperation, the Indian crew assisted in repairing the diesel generator aboard the Mauritian patrol vessel CGS Valiant, earning appreciation from Mauritian authorities. The port call also included a cultural dimension, as over 150 participants came together to mark International Day of Yoga 2025, further strengthening India's soft power and people-to-people engagement.

On the multilateral front, India hosted the [Indian Ocean Naval Symposium](#) (IONS) Working Group Meeting on Maritime Security (IWG-MARSEC) in New Delhi from June 24 to 25. The event witnessed participation from 13 IONS member countries Australia, Bangladesh, France, India, Kenya, Mozambique, Oman, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, and Thailand. In his keynote address, Rear Admiral Nirbhay Bapna, Assistant Chief of Naval Staff (Foreign Cooperation & Intelligence), reiterated India's commitment to cooperative security and maritime multilateralism. Discussions

among the delegates focused on enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), establishing mechanisms for real-time information sharing, and standardising operational protocols among IONS navies. The meeting reaffirmed the collective will of regional partners to strengthen coordination and deliver actionable outcomes in response to evolving maritime threats.

Together, these developments reflect India's multidimensional approach to maritime security combining operational capability, capacity building, gender inclusivity, and multilateral diplomacy to promote stability and collaboration across the Indian Ocean Region.

Africa Corps and the Strategic Rebranding of Russian Influence

On June 6 2025, the erstwhile [Wagner Group](#) announced that it would end its deployment in Mali after over three years marks a pivotal shift in Russia's evolving mercenary strategy in Africa. While Wagner's exit might seem like a withdrawal, it instead signifies a transition of Russian military operations on the continent to a more centralised structure under the Kremlin. Despite declaring its mission "accomplished," Wagner's legacy in Mali has been deeply controversial.

The group claims to have restored territorial control and eliminated militants, but independent reporting and field assessments suggest that the security situation in Mali has deteriorated under its watch. Since Wagner's arrival in 2021, jihadist activity has surged, and 2024 saw some of the highest recorded fatalities from Islamist groups across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Mali's capital, Bamako, even

experienced its first insurgent attack in nearly a decade.

The Kremlin moved quickly after the 2023 Wagner mutiny and the suspicious death of its leader Yevgeny Prigozhin to consolidate control over its overseas operations. The [Africa Corps](#) was formed as a successor to Wagner and is directly under the Russian Ministry of Defense. While this provides Moscow with tighter command and oversight, it also exposes the Russian state to direct accountability for its mercenaries' actions.

Previously, Wagner's ambiguous legal status provided a buffer against diplomatic blowback and domestic scrutiny. With Africa Corps, Moscow has sacrificed plausible deniability. Although Wagner has formally exited Mali, many of its fighters are expected to remain under new contracts with the Africa Corps, meaning the reality on the ground may not change significantly.

Russia's military [footprint](#) in Africa remains extensive. Mercenaries operate in at least six African states, though not all have transitioned entirely to Africa Corps. Libya is the only case of a complete handover. In the Central African Republic, Wagner forces still dominate but are gradually being absorbed under Russian state control. In Niger and Burkina Faso, Africa Corps has signed fresh contracts post-Wagner, while the situation in Sudan remains ambiguous. These deployments largely serve to prop up fragile or authoritarian regimes, train local forces, and conduct counterinsurgency operations.

However, the results are mixed at best. [Human rights violations](#), indiscriminate violence, and civilian casualties have

defined their operations. In late 2024 and early 2025, Russian-backed forces in Mali were responsible for killing dozens of civilians and torching entire villages. These atrocities are no longer deniable as excesses of a rogue actor they now fall under state responsibility.

Wagner's [brutality](#) was once an unofficial hallmark of its operational strategy, but this has become a liability for Moscow. Public sentiment in many African regions where Russian forces operate has grown increasingly hostile. Malian military officers, once enthusiastic about Wagner, are reportedly disillusioned due to repeated battlefield failures, including the disastrous July 2024 Tinzawaten ambush. Moreover, Russia's continued diversion of manpower and weapons to Ukraine underscores its limited capacity to sustain expansive operations in Africa. In Burkina Faso, Africa Corps personnel were pulled back within months of deployment, weakening security services and revealing the unreliable nature of Russian support.

Further complicating matters is speculation that oligarch Gennady Timchenko may now oversee Africa Corps operations, continuing the patronage-based structure reminiscent of Wagner. However, ultimate accountability rests with the Kremlin. Moscow's deeper entanglement in African conflicts comes at a high cost. Unlike Wagner, the [Africa Corps](#) cannot simply walk away from failed missions. The burden of failure, civilian deaths, and strategic losses now falls squarely on the Russian state. While the rebranding may provide temporary operational continuity, it also risks turning Russia's Africa engagements into open-ended and unpopular entanglements forever wars with

no clear exit, growing civilian backlash, and increasing reputational damage for the Kremlin.

From Johannesburg to Antananarivo: India Builds Bridges in Africa

India's strategic engagement with Africa saw renewed momentum in June 2025 through a series of high-level diplomatic and defence interactions that underscored New Delhi's deepening commitment to the continent, especially in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The engagements began on June 17, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa on the [sidelines](#) of the 51st G7 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada. Though brief, the meeting reflected the growing frequency and importance of India–Africa interactions within multilateral frameworks. Sharing his thoughts on social media [platform X](#), Prime Minister Modi stated: “Happy to interact with the President of South Africa, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa at the G7 Summit. @CyrilRamaphosa”

This spirit of strategic [outreach](#) continued with Defence Secretary Shri Rajesh Kumar Singh leading the Indian delegation to Johannesburg from June 23 to 24, 2025 for the 9th India–South Africa Joint Defence Committee (JDC) meeting. Co-chaired by Dr. Thobekile Gamede, South Africa's Acting Secretary for Defence, the JDC meeting marked a milestone in bilateral defence cooperation.

Two key agreements were signed, advancing collaboration in submarine technologies and reflecting a shared intent to build a deeper defence-industrial

partnership. Discussions reviewed progress in defence policy alignment, acquisition processes, research and development initiatives, and enhanced military-to-military cooperation. The Indian delegation emphasised the country's expanding indigenous defence manufacturing capacity and the export potential of its defence products under the Make in India initiative, positioning India as a reliable partner in the global defence landscape.

Parallel to this engagement, Raksha Rajya Mantri Shri Sanjay Seth [embarked](#) on an official visit to Kenya and Madagascar from June 23 to 26. In Taita-Taveta County, Kenya, he participated in the joint [unveiling](#) of a Commemorative Pillar honouring the shared military sacrifices of Indian and Kenyan soldiers during World War I and II. The event was a powerful tribute to historical solidarity and reflected the depth of mutual respect between the two nations.

From Kenya, the Minister travelled to Antananarivo, [Madagascar](#), where he represented India at the country's 65th Independence Day celebrations and the anniversary of the Malagasy Armed Forces. His visit, from June 25 to 27, 2025 included a productive bilateral meeting with Lt Gen Sahivelo Lala Monja Delphin, Minister of the Armed Forces of Madagascar. The discussions focused on strengthening defence cooperation in maritime security and capacity building areas central to the security architecture of the Indian Ocean Region.

The Minister also called on Madagascar's Prime Minister, Mr. Christian Ntsay, conveying greetings from Prime Minister Modi and reaffirming India's enduring commitment to a deeper partnership. At a

community reception hosted by the Indian Embassy, Shri Sanjay Seth addressed members of the Indian diaspora, highlighting India's ongoing economic transformation and its growing stature on the world stage under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. Collectively, these engagements reflect India's sustained outreach to African partners, driven by shared strategic interests and historical bonds. They reinforce the vision of *MAHASAGAR* (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) through which India seeks to promote regional security, development, and solidarity in the Indian Ocean and beyond.