

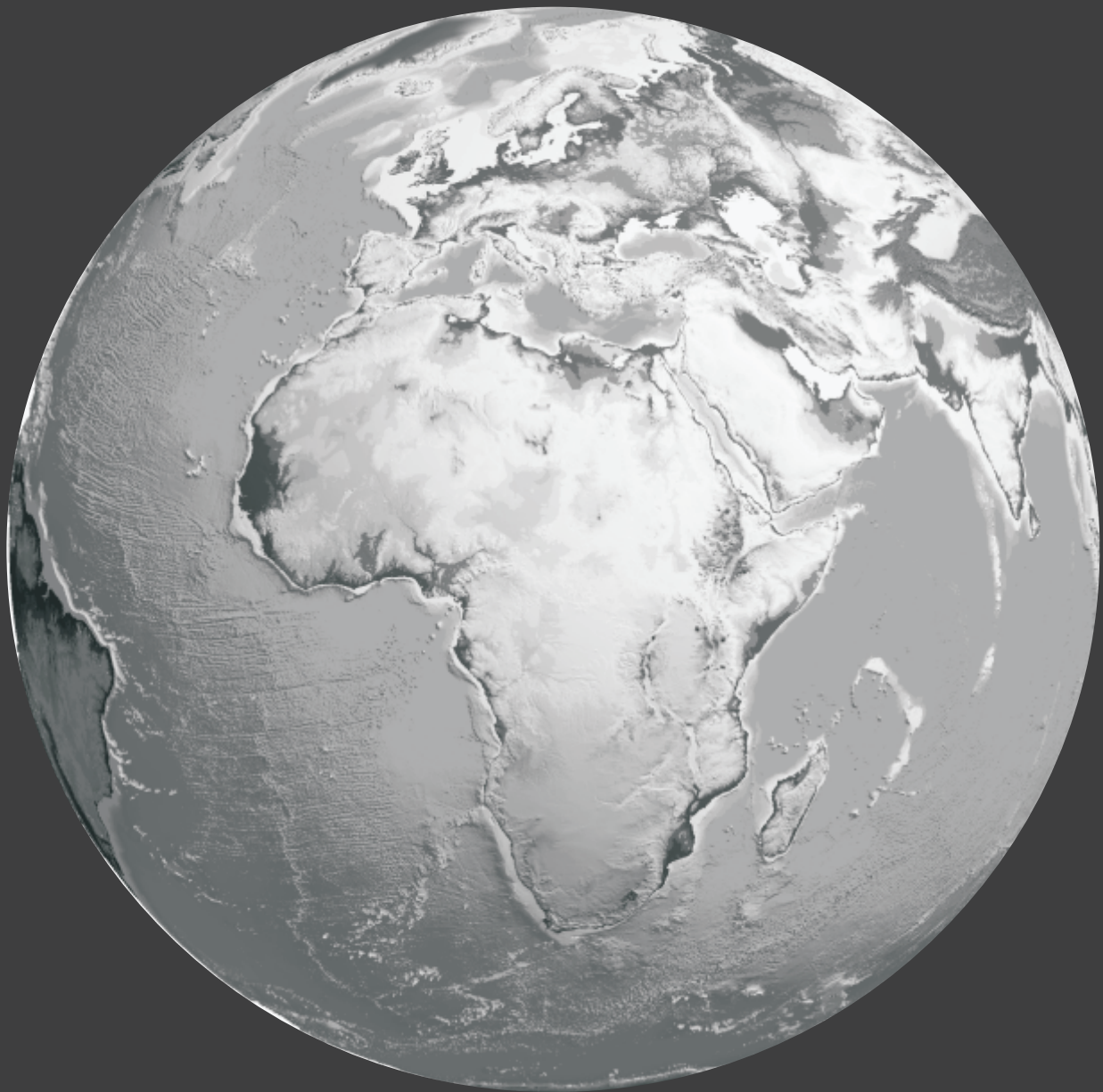
Africa Trends

Volume 14, Issue 1

Jan-June 2025

ISSN: 2456-7329

A Biannual Magazine on Africa



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

Editor

Rajeesh Kumar

Associate Editor

Abhishek Mishra

Assistant Editor

Mohanasakthivel J.

In This Issue

Page

EDITOR'S NOTE

5

COVER STORY

6-13

Forging Strategic Bonds: India's Expanding Defence Footprint in North Africa

Shayesta Nishat Ahmed

COMMENTARY

14-22

Russia's Nuclear Energy Diplomacy in Africa

Samir Bhattacharya

COMMENTARY

23-36

From Peacekeeping to Partnership: India's Evolving Role in South Sudan

Lt Col Kunal Sharma

VIEWPOINT

37-43

The Cycles of Violence That Have Fuelled Burkina Faso's Insecurity

Charlie Werb

BOOK REVIEW

44-46

Africa's Quest for Modernity: Lessons from Japan and China

Arnab Dasgupta

Disclaimer

Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Manohar Parrikar IDSA or of the Government of India.

Editor's Note

This issue of *Africa Trends* brings together diverse perspectives on Africa's shifting strategic landscape, weaving together themes of defence diplomacy, energy geopolitics, and security challenges. We begin with the cover story by Dr. Shayesta Nishat Ahmed, *Forging Strategic Bonds: India's Expanding Defence Footprint in North Africa*, which shows how partnerships with Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria not only support regional modernisation but also open new gateways for India's influence across Europe and Africa. Building on this discussion of strategic engagement, Dr. Samir Bhattacharya's *Russia's Nuclear Energy Diplomacy in Africa* examines how Moscow is leveraging nuclear partnerships to address Africa's energy deficit while embedding long-term geopolitical influence, filling the void left by reduced Western involvement. Shifting focus from energy to peacebuilding, Lt Col Kunal Sharma's *From Peacekeeping to Partnership* traces India's evolving role in South Sudan, emphasising the importance of aligning cooperation with national development priorities and post-conflict stability. Extending the lens to the Sahel, Mr. Charlie Werb's *Viewpoint* unpacks how cycles of violence in Burkina Faso have entrenched insecurity and strengthened extremist actors. Concluding the issue, Dr. Arnab Dasgupta's review of *Africa's Quest for Modernity* critically explores the promise and pitfalls of adapting East Asian development models to Africa's unique context.

We welcome your feedback.

Cover Story

FORGING STRATEGIC BONDS: INDIA'S EXPANDING DEFENCE FOOTPRINT IN NORTH AFRICA

India has increasingly become a key defence partner for North African nations like Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria, with significant potential for defence industry collaboration and arms exports. The North African region presents a strategic opportunity for India to expand its defence diplomacy and strengthen ties with the African continent. This article explores how India aligns with North African countries' defence modernisation goals and industrial cooperation efforts. Given North Africa's position as a gateway to Europe and Africa, fostering strong economic and defence ties could enhance India's regional influence through arms trade, industry partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives.

Shayesta Nishat Ahmed*

Introduction

India's defence diplomacy has witnessed a notable expansion over the past few years, reflecting the country's ambition to be a key security and industrial partner in regions of strategic importance. Among these, **North Africa**—particularly Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria—has emerged as a focal point of India's defence outreach. India has endeavoured to leverage its historical ties, political goodwill, and complementary interests with Egypt,

India has endeavoured to leverage its historical ties, political goodwill, and complementary interests with Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria, who were all also part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Morocco, and Algeria, who were all also part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). India's engagement with these nations encompass high-level visits, military training, joint exercises, and defence industrial cooperation. North Africa's geostrategic location—connecting Europe, the Middle East, and Sub-Saharan Africa—makes it a vital partner in India's vision of extended neighbourhood diplomacy and South-South cooperation. As part of its "Atmanirbhar Bharat"

* Research Analyst, Defence Economics & Industry Centre, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA), New Delhi.

initiative, India is also promoting defence exports and co-production, offering cost-effective, high-quality systems to North African militaries seeking diversification and modernisation.¹

This article examines India's evolving defence engagement with North Africa, focusing on three pillars: military diplomacy, industrial cooperation, and arms exports. It highlights India's efforts to position itself as a trusted defence partner through structured dialogue, joint training, and technology transfer, while enhancing its strategic presence across the region. These initiatives align with the vision outlined by Prime Minister Modi in his 2018 address to the Ugandan Parliament, where he underscored India's commitment to supporting employment generation, youth empowerment, agricultural innovation, climate resilience, and regional stability.² In line with this, India is steadily increasing its defence presence in Africa by engaging key partners like Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco, offering affordable and high-quality military solutions.

Strategic Importance of North Africa

The North African region controls vital maritime routes through the Mediterranean Sea and the Suez Canal – an artery for global trade, including India's energy imports and outbound exports to Europe and North America. For India, North Africa's strategic significance lies not only in geography, but also in political alignment and shared developmental priorities. Egypt, Morocco, and Algeria are increasingly looking eastward to diversify their defence partnerships and reduce overdependence on traditional Western suppliers. These nations also seek partners that offer cost-effective, high-quality defence equipment and respect sovereignty in foreign policy – areas where India holds comparative advantage.³ Furthermore, North Africa plays a stabilising role in addressing transnational threats such as terrorism, maritime piracy, arms trafficking, and illegal migration. Enhanced defence cooperation in the region can directly support India's own maritime security interests in the Western Indian Ocean and broaden its role in Africa's peace and security architecture, including through United Nations Peacekeeping Operations.⁴

For India, North Africa's strategic significance lies not only in geography, but also in political alignment and shared developmental priorities.

The recently released SIPRI data on recent trends in international arms transfers in the Middle East and North Africa, highlighted that the region has witnessed increased arms imports, focusing mainly on combat aircraft, frigates, and anti-ballistic missiles. From 2020–24, aircraft made up the largest share (43 percent), followed by ships (20 percent) and missiles (16 percent).⁵ The growing demand for long-range strike capabilities, naval security, and airspace defence – reflected in Egypt's focus on such arms imports over the past decade – is driven by regional tensions in the eastern Mediterranean, conflicts in Sudan and Libya, and strained relations with Israel.⁶ Between 2020–24 Algeria and Morocco were North Africa's top arms importers, accounting for 53 percent and 34 percent of the region's imports, respectively – reflecting their ongoing tensions, particularly over Western Sahara. Algeria's arms imports dropped by 73 percent compared to 2015–19, mainly due to procurement cycles, with key deliveries including armoured vehicles, aircraft (notably Russian combat jets and Chinese

UAVs), and ships. Morocco's imports fell by 26 percent from 2015–19, though its peak was in 2010–14. Over half of its known missile imports were Israeli Surface-to-air missile (SAMs), and of 55 aircraft received, nearly half were UAVs, mainly from Türkiye.

Recognising Africa's increasing strategic importance, India has institutionalised its defence engagement with the continent through platforms like the India-Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave (IADMC), held alongside DefExpo since 2020. This reflects India's broader objective of enhancing security cooperation and deepening defence ties, especially as it

India's historical role in African security—including peacekeeping operations, maritime security, counterterrorism, and capacity-building, is now being reinforced through structured initiatives such as the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AF-INDEX), which promotes interoperability and showcases Indian defence capabilities.

pursues the ambitious goal of achieving ¹ 50,000 crore in defence exports by 2029—a target closely linked to its growing outreach across Africa.⁷ India's historical role in African security—including peacekeeping operations, maritime security, counterterrorism, and capacity-building, is now being reinforced through structured initiatives such as the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AF-INDEX), which promotes interoperability and showcases Indian defence capabilities. The 2023 edition of AF-INDEX, themed *Africa-India Militaries for Regional Unity (AMRUT)*, was aligned with the

African Union's Agenda 2063.⁸

Maritime collaboration has also deepened under India's SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision, through training programmes, hydrographic surveys, and joint maritime exercises. A noteworthy example is among these are the first IMT TRILAT exercise with Mozambique and Tanzania and India's participation in Exercise Cutlass Express, which supports maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean.⁹ Tanzania stands out as a key example of this growing partnership, marked by a mini DefExpo in 2022 and the formation of a joint task force to define a five-year cooperation plan.¹⁰ As SAGAR enters its second decade, Prime Minister Modi announced a new framework titled Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security across the Regions (MAHASAGAR) during his visit to Mauritius in March 2025. In alignment with this vision, the Indian Navy launched two key initiatives—IOS SAGAR and Africa India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME)—designed to reinforce its role as the 'Preferred Security Partner' and the 'First Responder' in the Indian Ocean Region.¹¹ To build on this momentum, India must institutionalise these defence engagements and move beyond ad-hoc approaches to ensure long-term impact.

Overview of India's Defence Diplomacy with North Africa

Among North African countries, Egypt stands out as India's principal defence partner. The bilateral relationship between the two was revitalised following the landmark visit of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi as Chief Guest for India's Republic Day in 2023.¹² This visit resulted in the elevation of ties to a 'Strategic Partnership,' with a particular emphasis on defence cooperation, counter-terrorism, cyber security, and military training.¹³ Historical milestones include the joint development of a fighter aircraft in the 1960s and the

training of Egyptian pilots by the Indian Air Force (IAF) until 1984.¹⁴ Institutional frameworks such as the Joint Defence Committee (JDC), National Security Advisor-level dialogues, and the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counterterrorism—convened notably in January 2016 and most recently in April 2025—have cemented bilateral security cooperation.¹⁵ This relationship was further reinforced by Egypt's participation in DefExpo 2016 and the signing of an MoU between the two National Security Councils.

In recent years, both countries have expanded collaboration to include co-production, maintenance of defence platforms, and enhanced joint training. Egyptian officers regularly attend professional military education courses in India (DSSC and NDC), while Indian officers receive training in Egypt. Operational synergy has grown through joint exercises such as the IAF-EAF 'Desert Warrior' (2021), Tactical Leadership Programme (2022, 2024), bilateral air drills (2023, 2024), and India's first participation in 'Bright Star-2023'. Naval and Special Forces cooperation has also deepened, with joint participation in MILAN-2024 and the third edition of Exercise Cyclone in February 2025. Egypt's presence at Aero India 2025 also signalled expanding interest in defence industrial cooperation.¹⁶ High-level military dialogues and staff-level exchanges are supported by regular port calls, ship visits, and joint training programmes.

India and Morocco's defence relations have also steadily advanced, with naval diplomacy and joint defence manufacturing forming the cornerstone of bilateral engagement. The Indian Navy has conducted a series of port visits and maritime exercises with the Royal Moroccan Navy, including Passage Exercises (PASSEX) and Maritime Partnership Exercises (MPX), involving ships such as INS Tarkash, INS Tabar, INS Sumedha, and INS Tushil.¹⁷ Notable examples include joint drills with Moroccan vessels Hassan-II and L C Arrahmani in 2022 and 2023, respectively.¹⁸ These engagements have enhanced interoperability and tactical coordination, even in the absence of a formal defence agreement. Morocco's geostrategic position—linking Europe, Africa, and the Atlantic—complements India's SAGAR vision and broader foreign policy objectives. As a gateway to African markets and a strategic partner in the western Mediterranean, Morocco enables India to expand its regional footprint while promoting South-South cooperation and capacity-building in maritime security.

The shared global interests of Algeria and India were further solidified in 2016 when then-Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal expressed strong support for India's position on Jammu and Kashmir during a meeting with the Indian Vice President.¹⁹ The two countries have been working closely in developing strategic relationship, among which, space cooperation

The Indian Navy has conducted a series of port visits and maritime exercises with the Royal Moroccan Navy, including Passage Exercises (PASSEX) and Maritime Partnership Exercises (MPX), involving ships such as INS Tarkash, INS Tabar, INS Sumedha, and INS Tushil.

The shared global interests of Algeria and India were further solidified in 2016 when then-Prime Minister Abdelmalek Sellal expressed strong support for India's position on Jammu and Kashmir during a meeting with the Indian Vice President.

in September 2018 which entail close cooperation between the two in areas of remote sensing, satellite communication technologies, including disaster management and crop forecasting.²⁰ Notably, India successfully launched four Algerian satellites in 2016 through its PSLV-C35 mission. The INS Tabar also conducted its first Maritime Partnership Exercise with Algerian Navy ship Ezzadjer in August 2021, to enhance interoperability and maritime security cooperation.²¹ This was followed by high-ranking delegation visit of the Chief of the Defence Force (CDS) General Anil Chauhan, where both states signed a MoU on defence cooperation with Chief of Staff of the Algerian People's National Army General Saïd Chanegriha, from 31 October to 3 November 2024.²² India also reaffirmed its commitment to peaceful conflict resolution and announced the re-establishment of its defence wing in Algeria, while supporting Algeria's plans for a similar office in India. Further solidifying ties, General Saïd Chanegriha, visited India from February 6–12, 2025, participated in Aero India 2025, and engaged in high-level talks with Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh, including the Defence Ministers' Conclave themed 'BRIDGE – Building Resilience through International Defence and Global Engagement'.²³

Several joint exercises including MILAN, VARUNA, and IBSAMAR have been conducted especially as India is a resident power in the Indian Ocean and Africa is an integral part of India's Indo-Pacific vision. These engagements serve not only India's foreign policy goals but also contribute to regional peace and stability, aligning with African countries' aspirations for strategic autonomy and indigenous capacity.

Scope for Defence Industrial Cooperation

These North African nations are actively pursuing defence modernisation, diversification of procurement sources, and the development of indigenous capabilities—objectives that align closely with India's strengths in cost-effective defence manufacturing, capacity-building, and training. As part of India's effort, defence attaches have been strategically appointed in African countries like Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania, Mozambique, and Ivory Coast, in addition to existing advisors in Egypt, Algeria, Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria, to promote exports.²⁴

Recent high-level exchanges have seen Egypt express strong interest in Indian defence platforms such as the BrahMos, Akash missile systems, Smart Anti-Airfield Weapon (SAAW), and electronic warfare technologies.²⁵ Among Indian offerings, the Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL)'s air defence system - Akash system has drawn particular attention for its operational capabilities and export success.²⁶

In the context of Morocco, in 2022, TATA Advanced Systems supplied tactical transport trucks, including LPTA-715 and 90 LPTA 2445 6x6 vehicles, to the Moroccan Army.²⁷ A major milestone is the Tata Advanced System Limited (TASL) contract to supply 150 WhAP (Wheeled Armoured Platform) vehicles to Morocco, a local manufacturing facility in Casablanca, Morocco, on 30 September 2024.²⁸ This marks India's largest global deal for armoured vehicles and highlights the country's Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) defence production capabilities. India's Kalashnikov AK-203 facility in Uttar Pradesh is also delivering weapons that have attracted interest from African nations.²⁹ As India seeks export markets for systems

like the WhAP – such strategic partnerships, particularly with Morocco, are vital for sustaining indigenous defence manufacturing. As a part of expanding its defence procurement portfolio, signed a Defence Cooperation MoU with India in 2018.³⁰ These developments reflect Morocco's strategic move to diversify its defence ties and deepen collaboration with India beyond its traditional partners.

Indian training institutions – such as the National Defence College and Defence Services Staff College – have been welcoming Moroccan officers, fostering long-term interoperability and goodwill. India has initiated several defence diplomacy outreach with an official National Defence College (NDC) delegation, such as the recently concluded visit to Morocco from 1 – 7 June 2025.³¹ CDS Gen Anil Chauhan and Gen Said Chanegriha also signed a landmark agreement to enhance India-Algeria defence cooperation, paving the way for long-term collaboration across multiple sectors.³² The latter also visited key defence and aerospace firms like BrahMos, GSL, BEL, L&T Defence, and Bharat Forge.³³ Though its defence acquisitions are largely of Russian origin, India can complement Algerian capacity-building through customised training programmes.³⁴ Algeria, has expressed interest in procuring key Indian defence platforms, including Arjun battle tanks, Pinaka rocket systems, BrahMos missiles, and Akash surface-to-air missile systems capable of intercepting aircraft, drones, helicopters, and subsonic cruise missiles.³⁵

Conclusion

India's deepening defence engagement with North Africa reflects a strategic confluence of mutual interests, geopolitical shifts, and the expanding contours of New Delhi's "Act East through West" approach. These engagements are no longer limited to symbolic exchanges but are increasingly driven by operational training, joint exercises, platform co-development, and high-level strategic dialogue. North Africa's pursuit of diversified defence partnerships aligns seamlessly with India's strengths in cost-effective, adaptable military systems and capacity-building initiatives. As regional actors seek sovereignty and technological self-reliance in their defence sectors, India's model of South-South cooperation – anchored in affordability, availability, and adaptability (3A) – offers a compelling alternative to traditional suppliers.³⁶ Through institutional frameworks like the India-Africa Defence Ministers' Conclave and joint ventures such as the Tata-Morocco armoured vehicle deal, India is reinforcing its presence as a trusted partner and building long-term interoperability.

Looking ahead, sustained engagement, targeted export strategies, and joint industrial ventures will be crucial to maintaining momentum and translating goodwill into tangible strategic outcomes. As North Africa continues to recalibrate its defence priorities in an increasingly multipolar world, India's collaborative, capacity-building approach offers a pathway to shared resilience, regional stability, and mutual prosperity.

¹ "Atmanirbhar Bharat in Defence", Press Information Bureau (PIB), Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 1 February 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2098431>, (Accessed 21 May 2025).

- ² “Prime Minister’s address at Parliament of Uganda during his State Visit to Uganda”, Speeches and Statements, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 July 2018, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/30152/Prime+Ministers+address+at+Parliament+of+Uganda+during+his+State+Visit+to+Ugand>, (Accessed 22 May 2025).
- ³ Abdessalam Saad Jaldi, Hamza Mjahed, “North Africa’s Invisible Partner: Exploring India’s Political and Economic Influence in the Region”, Policy Paper, Policy Center for the New South, 10 April 2023, https://www.policycenter.ma/sites/default/files/2023-04/PP_04-23%20%28Jaldi%20%26%20Mjahed%29%20%281%29.pdf, (Accessed 22 May 2025).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ SIPRI, “Recent Trends in International Arms Transfers to the Middle East and North Africa”, 2025. Available at: <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounders/2025/recent-trends-international-arms-transfers-middle-east-and-north-africa>, (Accessed 27 June 2025).
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ “Make in India Powers Defence Growth”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 24 March 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2114546>, (Accessed 23 May 2025).
- ⁸ “India-Africa Joint Military Exercise ‘AFINDEX-23’ Concluded at Foreign Training Node, Aundh, Pune”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 29 March 2023, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1911766>, (Accessed 23 May 2025).
- ⁹ “India - Mozambique - Tanzania Trilateral Exercise IMT TRILAT- 2024”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 21 March 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseFramePage.aspx?PRID=2015968>, (Accessed 24 May 2025).
- ¹⁰ “Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh & his Tanzanian counterpart Dr Stergomena Lawrence Tax hold bilateral talks in New Delhi”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 26 August 2022, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1854697>, (Accessed 24 May 2025).
- ¹¹ “Indian Navy’s Maiden Initiatives Of Indian Ocean Ship SAGAR (IOS SAGAR) and Africa India Key Maritime ENGAGEMENT (AIKEYME)”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 24 March 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseFramePage.aspx?PRID=2114491>, (Accessed 10 June 2025).
- ¹² “First Training Squadron Participates in CUTLASS EXPRESS 24”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 10 March 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseFramePage.aspx?PRID=2013170>, (Accessed 25 May 2025).
- ¹³ “India-Egypt Joint Statement during the State Visit of the President of Egypt to India (January 24-27, 2023)”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 January 2023, https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36148/IndiaEgypt_Joint_Statement_during_the_State_Visit_of_the_President_of_Egypt_to_India_January_2427_2023, (Accessed 25 May 2025).
- ¹⁴ “India-Egypt Bilateral Relations”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 23 May 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Egypt-May-2025.pdf>, (Accessed 26 May 2025).
- ¹⁵ “4th Meeting of India-Egypt Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 30 April 2025, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/39453/4th+Meeting+of+IndiaEgypt+Joint+Working+Group+on+Counter+Terrorism+April+30+2025>, (Accessed 23 May 2025).
- ¹⁶ “India-Egypt Bilateral Relations”, See No. 11.
- ¹⁷ “Indian Naval Ship TUSHIL at Casablanca, Morocco”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 28 December 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2088564>, (Accessed 28 May 2025).
- ¹⁸ “India-Morocco Bilateral Relations”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 23 October 2023, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Morocco-2023.pdf>, (Accessed 29 May 2025).
- ¹⁹ Abdessalam Saad Jaldi, Hamza Mjahed, “North Africa’s Invisible Partner: Exploring India’s Political and Economic Influence in the Region”, See No. 3.

- ²⁰ “India-Algeria Relations”, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 20 May 2025, <https://www.indianembassyalgers.gov.in/page/india-algeria-relations/>, (Accessed 28 May 2025).
- ²¹ “Indian Navy’s Maiden Exercise with Algerian Navy”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 31 August 2021, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1750639>, (Accessed 29 May 2025).
- ²² “CDS Gen Anil Chauhan concludes his four day visit to Algeria”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 4 November 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2070684>, (Accessed 31 May 2025).
- ²³ “General Saïd Chanegriha, Minister Delegate to the Minister of National Defence, Chief of Staff of People’s National Army, Algeria to visit India”, PIB, Ministry of Defence, Government of India, 5 February 2025, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2099928>, (Accessed 31 May 2025).
- ²⁴ Smruti Deshpande, “With defence push, India looks to capture markets in Africa beyond western Indian Ocean”, The Print, 19 May 2024, <https://theprint.in/defence/with-defence-push-india-looks-to-capture-markets-in-africa-beyond-western-indian-ocean/2091310/>, (Accessed 25 May 2025).
- ²⁵ “Egypt eyes India’s Akash air defence missile system”, Egypt Defence Expo, 22 December 2023, <https://www.egyptdefenceexpo.com/news/egypt-eyes-indias-akash-air-defence-missile-system>, (Accessed 29 May 2025).
- ²⁶ Arabian Defence, “Egypt eyes India’s Akash air defence missile system”, 6 December 2023, <https://www.arabiandefence.com/2023/12/06/india-eyes-a-phased-growth-in-egyptian-defence-sector/>, (Accessed 31 May 2025).
- ²⁷ Abdessalam Saad Jaldi, Hamza Mjahed, “North Africa’s Invisible Partner: Exploring India’s Political and Economic Influence in the Region”, See No. 3.
- ²⁸ The Hindu Bureau, “Tata to set up final assembly line for armoured platform in Morocco”, The Hindu, 1 October 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/tata-to-set-up-final-assembly-line-for-armoured-platform-in-morocco/article68701865.ece>, (Accessed 30 May 2025).
- ²⁹ Shivani Sharma, “Indian-made AK-203 rifles draw increased interest from Africa, Middle East”, India Today, 25 September 2024, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/indian-made-ak-203-rifles-draw-increased-interest-from-africa-middle-east-2605978-2024-09-25>, (Accessed 3 June 2025).
- ³⁰ “Cabinet approves MoU between India and Morocco for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space”, PIB, Cabinet, Government of India, 6 December 2018, <https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1554947>, (Accessed 3 June 2025).
- ³¹ IANS, “Indian defence delegation in Morocco, to deepen bilateral ties & strategic engagement”, 2 June 2025, <https://ianslive.in/indian-defence-delegation-in-morocco-to-deepen-bilateral-ties-strategic-engagement-20250602090607>, (Accessed 3 June 2025).
- ³² “CDS Gen Anil Chauhan concludes his four day visit to Algeria”, See No. 19.
- ³³ “General Saïd Chanegriha, Minister Delegate to the Minister of National Defence, Chief of Staff of People’s National Army, Algeria to visit India”, See No. 20.
- ³⁴ Margarita Arredondas, “Algeria strengthens its military cooperation with India to break its dependence on Russia”, Atalayar, 10 February 2025, <https://www.atalayar.com/en/articulo/politics/algeria-strengthens-its-military-cooperation-with-india-to-break-its-dependence-on-russia/20250210115540211005.html>, (Accessed 1 June 2025).
- ³⁵ Saroj Bishoyi, “India’s Defence Exports: Recent Trends and the Way Forward, Vivekananda International Foundation (VIF) Paper, September 2023, <https://www.vifindia.org/sites/default/files/Indias-Defence-Exports-Recent-Trends-and-the-Way-Forward.pdf>, (Accessed 5 June 2025).
- ³⁶ Anil Trigunayat, “India and Africa – Scouting for new frontiers of defence cooperation”, 18 October 2022, CNBC TV18, <https://www.impriindia.com/insights/india-africa-defence-cooperation/>, (Accessed 29 May 2025).

Commentary

RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR ENERGY DIPLOMACY IN AFRICA

The strategic withdrawal of the United States from key energy initiatives in Africa, including the winding down of Power Africa and reduced support for Just Energy Transition Partnerships, has created a significant vacuum in the continent's energy diplomacy. This retreat coincides with Africa's acute energy deficit, where over 600 million people lack electricity access, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa. Russia has capitalised on this gap through its state-owned Rosatom corporation, aggressively expanding nuclear energy partnerships across over 20 African countries. Beyond addressing energy shortages, Russia's nuclear diplomacy serves as a geopolitical tool to deepen influence, foster long-term dependencies, and secure strategic alliances. While Russia offers comprehensive nuclear infrastructure solutions backed by flexible financing and political support, challenges remain, including financing constraints, institutional capacity gaps, and safety concerns. Despite symbolic agreements and ambitious projects, the long-term success of Russia's nuclear ambitions in Africa depends on genuine local engagement, transparency, and alignment with the continent's developmental priorities amid growing competition from China and Western actors.

Samir Bhattacharya*

Background

The deliberate withdrawal of the United States (US) from prominent international energy and development initiatives, notably during the administration of President Donald Trump, has resulted in a substantial void in global energy diplomacy. These shortcomings are particularly pronounced in Africa, the continent most afflicted by energy poverty, home to three-quarters of the world's population lacking electricity access. Achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7, which mandates universal access to energy, remains a distant objective for the majority of countries in the region. As of 2022, approximately 600 million individuals on the continent lacked access to electricity, accounting for 80% of the global electricity access gap.¹

* Samir Bhattacharya is an Associate Fellow at Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi.

This US withdrawal from global engagement extends beyond mere reductions in foreign aid and the imposition of trade tariffs. It also encompasses the termination of key initiatives, such as *Power Africa*, a program launched by President Barack Obama in 2013. Over its twelve-year span, *Power Africa* mobilised approximately \$1.2 billion in funding from the US government, which, in turn, catalysed nearly \$29 billion in private-sector investment.² The initiative supported the development of over 150 energy infrastructure projects across 42 African nations, ultimately expanding electricity access to more than 200 million individuals and generating an estimated \$26.4 billion in commercial deals involving American firms.³ Simultaneously, the US decision to withdraw from the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) has led to a decline in grant funding and investment commitments, notably affecting countries like South Africa.⁴

Amid this strategic retrenchment of the US, the Russian Federation has seized the opportunity to expand its presence across Africa, leveraging nuclear energy as a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Although Russia is widely acknowledged as the world's biggest natural gas exporter, the second-largest oil exporter, and the third-largest coal exporter,⁵ its prominence and influence in the nuclear energy sector have garnered comparatively less attention. Through its state-owned enterprise Rosatom, Russia maintains an extensive portfolio of international nuclear projects, encompassing engagements in 54 countries and valued at over \$139 billion over a decade.⁶ These engagements encompass a comprehensive range of services, including the construction of nuclear reactors, the supply of nuclear fuel, lifecycle maintenance, and the provision of advanced nuclear technologies.

In addition to dominating nuclear reactor exports, Russia is leading in the global nuclear fuel cycle, accounting for approximately 40 per cent of global uranium conversion capacity and 46 per cent enrichment capacity as of 2020.⁷ Between February 2022 and 2024, despite broad international sanctions following the war in Ukraine, Russia exported over \$1 billion in nuclear energy-related products.⁸ Notably, nuclear cooperation has thus far remained exempt from the scope of Western sanctions⁹, thereby enabling Russia to employ nuclear diplomacy as a strategic instrument of international engagement, particularly in Africa.

Nuclear power plant development entails long-term commitments spanning several decades, encompassing phases from initial construction to eventual decommissioning. As a result, such partnerships inherently foster enduring dependencies between supplier and recipient states. In this context, Russia increasingly regards nuclear energy not only as a commercial undertaking but also as a strategic instrument for advancing its geopolitical influence. This approach is particularly evident in Africa, where widespread energy deficits and infrastructural

Amid this strategic retrenchment of the US, the Russian Federation has seized the opportunity to expand its presence across Africa, leveraging nuclear energy as a cornerstone of its foreign policy.

Russia is leading in the global nuclear fuel cycle, accounting for approximately 40 per cent of global uranium conversion capacity and 46 per cent enrichment capacity as of

shortcomings present favourable conditions for deepening engagement. With nuclear cooperation agreements signed with at least 20 African countries, Russia has emerged as the leading supplier of nuclear technology to Africa, surpassing other major providers, including the US, China, South Korea, Canada, and France.¹⁰

The Energy Gap Meets Geopolitical Strategy

Amid escalating geopolitical tensions globally and Moscow's increasing international isolation following its attack on Ukraine, Russia has pivoted toward the Global South as a means to sustain and expand its international influence. Within this strategic realignment,

...nuclear cooperation agreements signed with at least 20 African countries, Russia has emerged as the leading supplier of nuclear technology to Africa, surpassing other major providers, including the US, China, South Korea, Canada, and France.

Africa has assumed a particular importance as a focal point for engagement. The continent's acute energy deficit, with over 800 million individuals lacking access to reliable electricity, represents both a formidable development challenge and a strategic opportunity.¹¹

Russia from other international actors who have often been reluctant to finance or support nuclear energy initiatives on the continent. Solar and wind energy, although renewable, are inherently unpredictable due to their dependence on variable weather conditions. At the

Russia has positioned itself to address this gap by exporting large-scale nuclear infrastructure, presenting it as a catalyst for long-term development and industrialisation. This approach distinguishes

Russia has framed its nuclear energy offering not merely as a commercial venture, but as a developmental lifeline, an integral component of Africa's modernisation and long-term energy security.

same time, fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas face growing criticism over their environmental impact.

From that perspective, nuclear power offers a reliable and consistent supply of electricity with minimal greenhouse gas emissions. Russia has framed its nuclear energy offering not merely as a commercial venture, but as a developmental lifeline, an integral component of Africa's modernisation and long-term

energy security.

Role of Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation

Since the dissolution of the erstwhile Soviet Union, Russia has steadily reconstituted key components of its foreign policy apparatus, with state-backed nuclear energy partnerships emerging as a cornerstone of its international diplomatic strategy. At the forefront of this initiative is the Rosatom State Atomic Energy Corporation, a wholly state-owned enterprise and successor to the Soviet Ministry of Atomic Energy. Officially reorganised as a state corporation in 2007, Rosatom operates under strategic directives issued by the President of the Russian Federation.¹² Over the past two decades, Rosatom has become the face of Russian nuclear diplomacy, having signed cooperation agreements with over 20 African countries.

Rosatom's extensive international portfolio encompasses nuclear reactor construction and the provision of nuclear fuel, technology transfer, personnel training, radioactive waste management, and long-term maintenance agreements. In Africa, its recent initiatives include a nuclear power plant in Burkina Faso, a floating nuclear facility in Guinea, and integrated nuclear and hydroelectric projects in the Republic of Congo. Meanwhile, Niger, an important uranium-producing country, has expressed interest in Russian investment in its nuclear sector, while Namibia has reportedly engaged in preliminary discussions with Rosatom on future cooperation.

As of 2020, Rosatom maintained a 10-year foreign order portfolio valued at approximately \$140 billion.¹³ This covers the construction of 34 nuclear power units across 11 countries – representing nearly 70% of the global market share in reactor exports.¹⁴ In parallel, Rosatom earned service and fuel supply contracts worth \$200.8 billion, providing operational lifecycles to 48 reactors outside Russia.

Competition from China and the West

Nevertheless, Russia's predominance in Africa's nascent nuclear energy landscape faces growing competition. China has emerged as a formidable competitor, intensifying its diplomatic and commercial efforts across the continent. The China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC) has become increasingly active in the region, seeking to integrate nuclear energy projects within the broader framework of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹⁵ China's nuclear diplomacy, underpinned by substantial financial capacity and the absence of international sanctions, has proven particularly appealing to African states seeking both investment and long-term infrastructure partnerships. Notably, China's recent agreement to assist Uganda in constructing its first nuclear power plant illustrates the seriousness of its ambitions in this domain.

While China presents an appealing combination of low-interest loans and integrated infrastructure solutions, its practical experience in international nuclear construction projects remains relatively limited. To date, CNNC has completed only one significant overseas nuclear project, which is located in Pakistan.¹⁶ By contrast, Rosatom possesses a considerably more extensive track record, with a portfolio of completed and operational projects spanning multiple continents. This is further reinforced by the corporation's flexible repayment arrangements and its demonstrated expertise in managing the entire lifecycle of nuclear power facilities.

On the other hand, Western nuclear companies, including France's Électricité de France (EDF) and various American firms, often struggle to compete with state-backed entities like Rosatom and CNNC. Operating primarily under commercial imperatives, these companies are subject to a range of constraints, including regulatory complexity, slower project approval timelines, and higher political and financial risk aversion. Nuclear projects in Western countries have frequently experienced delays and substantial cost overruns. For instance, EDF's Hinkley Point C project in the United Kingdom has seen its projected cost escalate from \$24 billion to over \$40 billion.¹⁷ Similarly, a major US nuclear project in South Carolina was abandoned in 2017 after consuming \$9 billion in sunk costs.¹⁸

Russia's comparative advantage

Rosatom's distinct competitive advantage lies in its ability to serve as a comprehensive, end-to-end nuclear service provider – effectively operating as a “one-stop shop” for nuclear infrastructure development.¹⁹ Its range of services extends beyond reactor construction to include workforce training, safety and security assistance in accordance with international non-proliferation standards, and provision of concessional financing through Russian state-owned banks and sovereign funds. These low-interest, long-term financing arrangements are frequently embedded within intergovernmental agreements, thereby giving Russia significant influence over the economic and political trajectories of its partner states.

Rosatom's distinct competitive advantage lies in its ability to serve as a comprehensive, end-to-end nuclear service provider-effectively operating as a "one-stop shop" for nuclear infrastructure development

The diplomatic backing of the Kremlin further bolsters Rosatom's global outreach. President Vladimir Putin has actively promoted nuclear diplomacy as a strategic tool for reestablishing and strengthening alliances, particularly in the Global South. This high-level political endorsement enables Rosatom to function as

an extension of Russian foreign policy, frequently operating in close coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The synergies between Rosatom's project implementation and the Kremlin's broader geopolitical goals underscore that nuclear cooperation extends well beyond energy. It serves as a vehicle for sustained political engagement, economic interdependence and diplomatic leverage.

Nevertheless, the financial exigencies arising from Russia's protracted war against Ukraine have strained the state's capacity to fund large-scale overseas initiatives. While Rosatom's existing contracts remain secure, its ability to initiate and sustain new billion-dollar projects may be increasingly constrained. Moreover, the reputational risks associated with aligning with a sanctioned and internationally isolated Russia may prompt some African states to hedge their bets or pursue alternative partnerships.

Despite these headwinds, Russia's comparative advantages in the nuclear sector, comprising extensive technical experience, vertical integration, flexible financing, and geopolitical backing, have enabled it to pursue a concerted campaign of nuclear diplomacy. In Africa, this approach transcends the mere provision of electricity; it is fundamentally focused on cultivating enduring bilateral relationships, influencing regional alliances, and embedding Russian influence within the critical infrastructure that will underpin the continent's long-term developmental trajectory.

Summit Diplomacy and Nuclear Signalling

Russia's ongoing conflict in Ukraine has necessitated a strategic recalibration of its nuclear diplomacy. The cancellation of Rosatom's 1,200 MW Hanhikivi nuclear power plant project in Finland shortly after the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine underscored the profound geopolitical consequences of the war.²⁰ In response, President Vladimir Putin has sought to

deepen alliances with countries in the Global South, particularly in Africa, which he characterises as vital partners in a multipolar international order. During recent state visits, including to North Korea and Vietnam, President Putin reiterated Russia's commitment to provide African nations with comprehensive "turnkey" nuclear infrastructure, occasionally backed by full financing arrangements.

This diplomatic orientation was prominently exemplified in the Russia–Africa summits held in Sochi (2019) and St. Petersburg (2023), where nuclear cooperation emerged as a focal point of Russia's engagement strategy. At the 2023 summit, President Putin presented nuclear energy as a foundational pillar for Africa's industrialisation and economic self-reliance.²¹ The summit culminated in the signing of a series of memoranda of understanding, highlighting Russia's intent to supplant Western influence with long-term technological and strategic partnerships. In Ghana, Russia continues to compete with the United States, China, South Korea, and France to secure Ghana's inaugural nuclear power facility construction contract.²²

South Africa: An Unrealised Alliance

South Africa has long expressed interest in nuclear energy cooperation with Rosatom. In September 2014, merely six months after Russia's internationally condemned annexation of Crimea, the two nations formalised a nuclear cooperation agreement valued at approximately \$76 billion. The arrangement, however, was marred by concerns over transparency and legality, and in 2017, South Africa's High Court declared it unlawful for violating constitutional procurement requirements.²³ This episode exemplifies the complex intersection of domestic governance, international diplomacy, and strategic energy policy.

Although the original initiative failed, Russia's diplomatic overtures have not ceased. Recent developments suggest an improvement and potential renewal of the past stalled discussion. On 17 February, South Africa's Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Gwede Mantashe, announced the government's renewed openness to pursuing nuclear collaboration with Russia.²⁴ This revived interest could place South Africa at odds with Western policy priorities, particularly given the evolving geopolitical stance of the United States under President Donald Trump.

Egypt: The Flagship Project

Russia's most prominent nuclear initiative in Africa is the El Dabaa Nuclear Power Plant. Located in Egypt, this \$28.75 billion undertaking is predominantly financed through a \$25 billion loan extended by the Russian government, repayable over 35 years.²⁵ As Rosatom's flagship project on the continent, El Dabaa represents a milestone in both Russia's nuclear diplomacy and Egypt's energy development. It is set to become Africa's second operational nuclear power station, following South Africa's Koeberg plant, which was commissioned nearly four decades ago.

Construction of El Dabaa commenced in 2020, with phased operations expected to begin during the 2030s. The facility will comprise four Generation III+ VVER-1200 light-water

reactors, each capable of producing 1,200 megawatts of electricity²⁶. Once operational, the plant is anticipated to significantly diversify and strengthen Egypt's national energy grid.

An integral component of the agreement entails the establishment of an on-site interim storage facility for spent nuclear fuel, which will later be transported to Russia for reprocessing.²⁷ Rosatom is the only company in the world that provides such services. The company will also oversee the long-term maintenance and servicing of the plant for 60 years, ensuring sustained technical cooperation.

Furthermore, the agreement encompasses the establishment of manufacturing facilities within Egypt to localise the production of nuclear plant components and foster knowledge transfer. Through El Dabaa, Russia is not merely exporting nuclear technology but embedding itself in Egypt's energy infrastructure, workforce development, and strategic planning. The project could work as a prototype for Russia's future engagements across Africa, combining technology, financing, and geopolitical influence in a single package.

Alliance of Sahel States: A Promise for Russian Supremacy

The Alliance of Sahel States (AES), formally established on 16 September 2023, represents a trilateral defence and cooperation pact among Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso. While primarily conceived as a framework for collective security and political autonomy, the AES also places significant emphasis on sustainable economic development, particularly through strategic energy initiatives.²⁸ Central to these ambitions is the prioritisation of regional energy projects, including the exploration of civil nuclear power as a long-term solution to chronic electricity deficits.

Niger, the world's fourth-largest producer of uranium and home to Africa's highest-grade uranium ore deposits contributes roughly 5% of global uranium output.²⁹ As the electricity access rate remains inconsistent, the government is considering nuclear power as a viable solution to stimulate economic growth.

Burkina Faso has already taken a definitive step toward nuclear development, entering into a memorandum of understanding with Russia's Rosatom for the construction of a nuclear power plant, an initiative poised to substantially enhance national energy capacity.³⁰

Meanwhile, Mali is advancing its National Nuclear Programme under the supervision of the Malian Radiation Protection Agency (AMARAP). Its atomic energy strategy extends beyond electricity to include applications in medical, mining, industry, agriculture, and scientific research. Furthermore, Mali has also announced intentions to collaborate with Rosatom on multiple nuclear infrastructure projects, positioning the AES as a key theatre for Russia's expanding nuclear diplomacy in Africa.³¹

The Grand Strategy: Influence Over Infrastructure

Russia's deployment of nuclear technology in Africa extends beyond addressing energy deficits; it reasserts Moscow's role as a dependable partner amid increasing Western scepticism. By securing long-term infrastructure agreements, Russia aims to forge enduring

alliances that enhance its diplomatic influence and secure access to critical raw materials. However, this approach faces considerable obstacles. Many agreements remain largely symbolic due to financial limitations, constrained technical capacity, and fragile institutional frameworks. Critics argue that Russia's nuclear diplomacy often functions more as political posturing – exaggerating commitments to advance broader geopolitical aims rather than achieving substantive progress.

While nuclear energy holds considerable promise for Africa's development, it entails significant challenges, including the need for extensive planning, substantial capital investment, robust regulatory oversight, and political stability. Many African states lack the institutional expertise to manage such complex projects, and securing adequate financing remains problematic. Furthermore, concerns over nuclear waste management and plant security persist, underscoring the considerable uncertainties facing Africa's nuclear ambitions.

A Nuclear Future or a Geopolitical Mirage?

Many nuclear agreements signed by African states remain preliminary, representing the initial phase in the complex and protracted process of nuclear project development. Nevertheless, these agreements carry significant symbolic weight for Russia amid its growing geopolitical isolation. For the Kremlin, such agreements transcend commercial interests, functioning as instruments of political influence. By aligning nuclear energy initiatives with diplomatic efforts, Moscow seeks to foster enduring partnerships, enhance its geopolitical stature, and accumulate political capital.

However, the success of this strategy depends on more than diplomatic rhetoric and formal accords. It requires transparency, dependable and sustained financing, authentic local endorsement, and institutional reforms within both African nations and Russia's foreign policy apparatus. The benefits of nuclear energy for Africa will only be realised if these projects genuinely address the continent's developmental priorities rather than primarily serving Russian geopolitical objectives.

¹ "Decoding Africa's Energy Journey: Three Key Numbers", *UNSDG*, 27 January 2025, (Accessed 16 March 2025).

² Nancy Lee, "What We're Losing: Energy, Growth, and Power Africa", *Centre for Global Development*, 25 February 2025, (Accessed 12 March 2025)

³ Martine Igini, "Trump Ends US Initiative to Boost Renewable Energy Projects, Electricity in Africa", *Earth*, 28 February 2025, (Accessed 16 March 2025)

⁴ "US withdraws from Just Energy Transition partnership with SA", *South Africa News Agency*, 7 March 2025, (Accessed 20 March 2025)

⁵ "Russia sees stable oil exports and booming gas business by 2050", *Reuters*, 14 April 2025, (Accessed 20 April 2025)

⁶ Szulecki, Kacper, and Indra Overland. "Russian nuclear energy diplomacy and its implications for energy security in the context of the war in Ukraine." *Nature Energy* 8, no. 4, 2023: 413-421. (Accessed 27 April 2025)

- ⁷ Catherine Clifford, "Russia dominates nuclear power supply chains — and the West needs to prepare now to be independent in the future", *CNBC*, 23 May 2022, (Accessed 29 April 2025)
- ⁸ Ariel Cohen. "China And Russia Now Dominate The Global Nuclear Trade". *Forbes*, 7 June 2024, (Accessed 29 April 2025)
- ⁹ "Western, Russian nuclear industries still intertwined, report says", *Reuters*, 19 September 2024, (Accessed 30 April 2025)
- ¹⁰ "Russia in Africa: An atlas", *European Parliament*. 13 February 2024, (Accessed 30 April 2025)
- ¹¹ Frans Timmermans and Fatih Birol, "Time to make energy poverty in Africa a thing of the past", *Al Jazeera*, 17 June 2021, (Accessed 30 April 2025)
- ¹² Oxford Analytica. "Rosatom will be bright spark in Russia's economy." *Emerald Expert Briefings, Oxford Analytica*, 15 September 2015 (Accessed 30 April 2025)
- ¹³ "Rosatom's 10-year foreign order portfolio at about \$140 bln", *Interfax*, 4 February 2021, (Accessed 30 April 2025)
- ¹⁴ "Assessing Russia's Nuclear Export Diplomacy in the Context of its Geopolitical Rivalries", *Knights Bridge*, September 2024, (Accessed 3 May 2025)
- ¹⁵ Samir Bhattacharya, "Advantage China in Africa's nuclear energy market race", *The Hindu*, 29 March 2025, (Accessed 3 May 2025)
- ¹⁶ "CNNC: New nuclear power unit exported to Pakistan", *China Daily*, 16 July 2023, (Accessed 3 May 2025)
- ¹⁷ America Hernandez, "Cost of EDF's new UK nuclear project rises to \$40 billion", *Reuters*, 20 February 2023, (Accessed 3 May 2025)
- ¹⁸ Mark Cooper, "A dozen reasons for the economic failure of nuclear power", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 17 October 2017, (Accessed 3 May 2025)
- ¹⁹ Katya Golubkova and Gleb Stolyarov, "Russia's Rosatom sees foreign revenues, new products fuelling rapid growth", *Reuters*, June 24, 2019, (Accessed 3 May 2025)
- ²⁰ "Finnish group scraps nuclear plant deal with Russia's Rosatom", *France24*, 02 May 2022, (Accessed 10 May 2025)
- ²¹ "Plenary session of the 8th Eastern Economic Forum", *President of Russia*, 12 September 2023, (Accessed 10 May 2025)
- ²² Adegunle Agbetiloye, "US, Russia, China, France, and South Korea compete to build Ghana's first nuclear power plant", *Business Insider Africa*, 22 May 2024, (Accessed 10 May 2025)
- ²³ Lynsey Chutel, "How two South African women stopped Zuma and Putin's \$76 billion Russian nuclear deal," *Quartz*, 25 April 2018, (Accessed 10 May 2025)
- ²⁴ Wendell Roelf, "South Africa open to nuclear project bids from Russia or Iran, minister says", *Reuters*, 17 February 2025, (Accessed 20 May 2025)
- ²⁵ "Russia to lend Egypt \$25 billion to build nuclear power plant", *Reuters*, 19 May 2016, (Accessed 20 May 2025)
- ²⁶ "Rosatom ships the key blanks for the reactor hall equipment of El Dabaa NPP (Egypt)", *Atom Media*, 11 July 2024, (Accessed 20 May 2025)
- ²⁷ Marina Lorenzini, "Why Egypt's new nuclear plant is a long-term win for Russia", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 20 December 2023, (Accessed 20 May 2025)
- ²⁸ Samir Bhattacharya, "The Alliance of Sahel States: A regional crisis in troubled West Africa", *Observer Research Foundation*, 1 March 2024, (Accessed 30 May 2025)
- ²⁹ "Niger is among the world's biggest uranium producers", *Reuters*, 31 July, 2023, (Accessed 30 May 2025)
- ³⁰ "Burkina Faso and Russia's Rosatom sign agreement for nuclear power plant", *Reuters*, 13 October 2023, (Accessed 30 May 2025)
- ³¹ "Mali and Rosatom seal nuclear energy cooperation agreements", *Energy News*, 15 July 2024, (Accessed 30 May 2025)

Commentary

FROM PEACEKEEPING TO PARTNERSHIP: INDIA'S EVOLVING ROLE IN SOUTH SUDAN

India's engagement with South Sudan began before its independence with signing of Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that supported by India in 2005. India remained committed in extending the support to South Sudan through investments in the region's hydrocarbon sector since 2003 giving economic support to the new nation. India's support to South Sudan remained primarily in the areas of security, bilateral trade and capacity building. However, it is pertinent that the strategic cooperation between India and South Sudan should be derived by the objectives of the India's foreign policy towards Africa and South Sudan's development priorities considering the regional challenges like South Sudan's civil war from 2013 to 2018 and ongoing tribal skirmishes till today. After the civil war ended South Sudan adopted Revised - National Development Strategy (R-NDS) 2021 - 2024 with focus on stabilizing economy and sustainable development. To ascertain the level of cooperation achieved between the two nations an analyses of cooperation achieved from 2005 till 2024 has been drawn. Also, India's interest, South Sudan's development priorities and regional challenges have been ascertained for identifying the emerging opportunities to secure India's interest in the region and realigning the strategic cooperation framework.

Lt Col Kunal Sharma*

India - South Sudan Strategic Cooperation: Overview

India and South Sudan cooperation dates back since 2005 when India supported signing of CPA and established consulate in 2007. India recognized South Sudan's independence in July 2011 and elevated its consulate to an embassy. India's 12th Vice President, Shri Mohammed Hamid

India and South Sudan cooperation dates back since 2005 when India supported signing of CPA and established consulate in 2007. India recognized South Sudan's independence in July 2011 and elevated its consulate to an embassy.

* Presently, he is serving in the Peacekeeping Mission at UNMISS as Coy Commander and contributed on various studies for UN peacekeeping operations.

Ansari also attended the independence celebrations in Juba to show solidarity¹. India remained committed in extending the support to South Sudan since 2003 when OVL[†] had invested in the region for the first time, since then US \$ 2.5 Billion have been invested in the hydrocarbon sector of South Sudan giving vital support to the economic development of the nation. The bilateral trade between two nations in 2016* valued at \$ 3.42 Million which peaked at \$100.50 Million in 2018 and by the end of 2023 it reduced to \$ 33.44 Million that is one – third from the peak². Indian companies also have presence in South Sudan in fields including hotel industry, constructions, boring, printing and suppliers. India signed a MoU with South Sudan in 2019 covering aspects of bilateral relations & friendship that became premise for cooperation³.

South Sudan adopted the South Sudan National Development Plan (SSNDP) 2011–2013 after the independence with South Sudan's Vision 2040: towards freedom, equality, justice, peace and prosperity for all, however, same was not achieved due to the internal ethnic conflict which ended in 2018 with signing of Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS)^{†4}. The SSNDP also succeeded by the South Sudan National Development Strategy (SSNDS) 2018 - 2021⁵. Due to the challenges in implementation, including COVID -19 and other issues the objectives of Strategy could not be achieved. The R-ARCSS mandates the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU)[‡] to review and revise the NDS as an instrument for implementation of the R-ARCSS and for taking South Sudan towards the development. Hence, in 2021, a Revised – National Development Strategy (R-NDS)[§] has been formulated by the Government of Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) which extends till 2024⁶.

These development strategies acted as the core drivers for strategic cooperation with India. India extended the cooperation in the areas of security, bilateral trade, capacity building, institutional development, bilateral institutional mechanism for close cooperations, tourism and cultural interactions that can be considered as aligned to the development strategies of South Sudan. A roadmap of strategic cooperation achieved till 2024 between India and South Sudan since 2005 post signing of CPA is given in Figure 1.

[†] OVL is ONGC Videsh Limited, it is a Public Sector Unit of government of India working in the field of extending Indian Investments in Global Energy Sector especially crude oil exploration

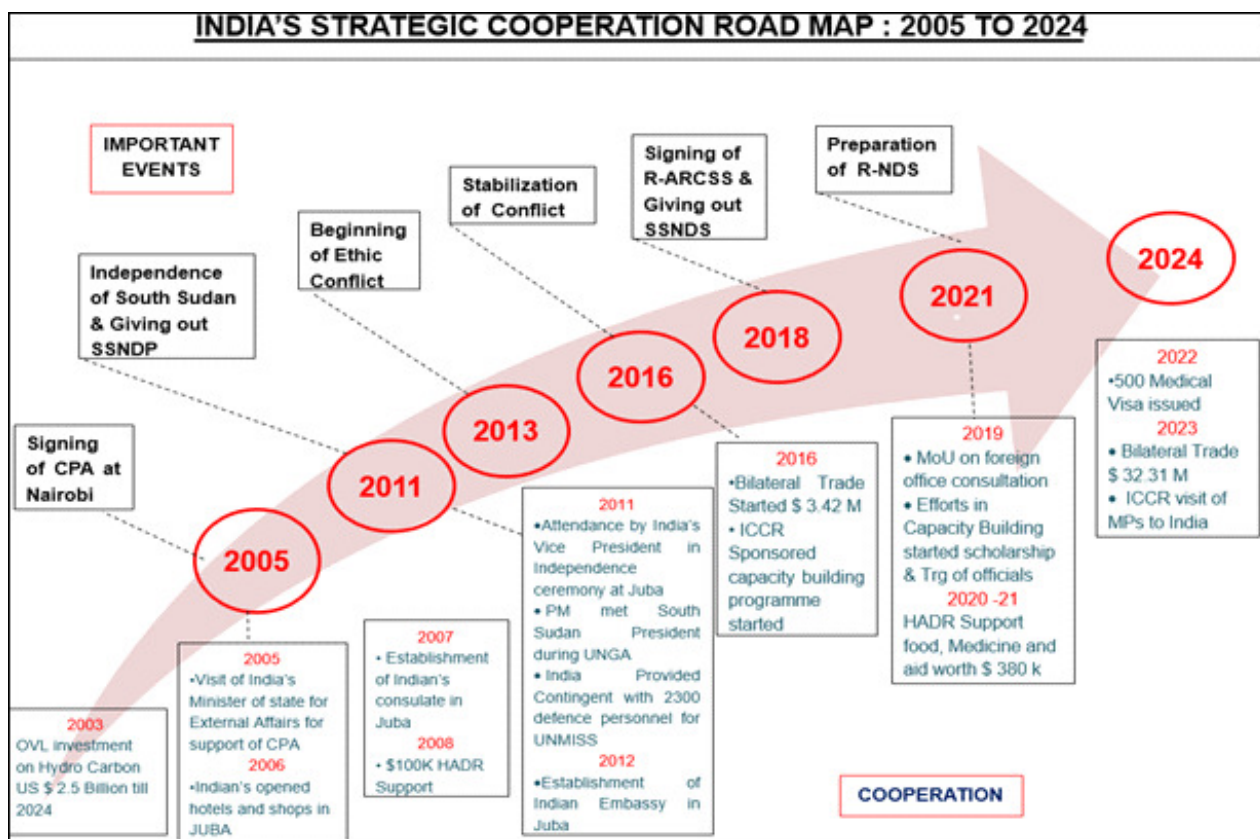
^{*} Precise data is not available as the trade is through Kenya, Uganda and UAE and Department of Commerce of India website has data from 2016.

[†] R-ARCSS was finalized on 12 September 2018 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, the document specifies various terms for resolution of conflict to bring stability in South Sudan and establishment of a Transitional Government.

[‡] The present government is not an elected government and known as Transitional Government which has representation of various ethnic tribes.

[§] R-NDS superseded SSNDS to consolidate peace, stabilize the economy and return to sustainable development

Figure 1: India's Strategic Cooperation Road Map 2005 to 2024



India's Strategic Cooperation Paradigm with South Sudan

Strategic cooperation with any nation is aligned with the bilateral requirements, interests and benefits of the two nations. India's strategic cooperation with South Sudan is essentially based on two pillars i.e India's foreign policy towards Africa and South Sudan's R-NDS. Understanding these two pillars is necessary to understand the cooperation paradigm.

- **India's Foreign Policy towards Africa:** India's Foreign Policy towards African nations was initially based on the support for anti-colonial movements and the anti-apartheid struggle⁷. Later, as the India's ambition of becoming global power progressed, India has considered to create an environment for working with African nations as equals, which aimed at supporting African nations in leadership roles and India as facilitator. The vision to develop as equals as given by PM Modi in the Kampala Principles* during his address to the Uganda's Parliament in 2018, this has been well appreciated by the African nations and India has taken the place of most trusted partner.⁸ These policies have also

* It comprises of 10 core tenets related of India – Africa cooperation

governed the India's relation with South Sudan. The goals which India intend to achieve with the cooperation and support from the African nations⁹ are:

- Secure African support in India's bid for a permanent membership in the UN Security Council.
- Work with African countries to restructure global financial and multilateral institutions to prioritize the Global South.
- Partner with African countries to suppress terrorism and ensure freedom of movement in the Indian Ocean.
- Secure India's resource and energy security.

- **South Sudan's R-NDS:** South Sudan as a nation is still in the process of stabilizing from the nearly half a decade long ethnic war after independence. It requires support from the other nations to achieve peace & stability to begin the journey towards development. Hence, the country has prepared R-NDS 2021 - 2024 which provides the medium-term development framework to implement the country's vision 2040. South Sudan is looking for the strategic partnership and cooperation which supports achieving the core objectives defined under five clusters of R-NDS¹⁰:

South Sudan as a nation is still in the process of stabilizing from the nearly half a decade long ethnic war after independence.

- *Governance Cluster:* Establish and/or strengthen institutions for transparent, accountable and inclusive governance.
- *Economic Cluster:* Foster macroeconomic stability and lay foundations for the diversification of the economy.
- *Infrastructure Cluster:* Build critical infrastructure for sustainable development, including roads, energy, public buildings and broadband capability.
- *Service Cluster:* Increase support to the social sector for human capital development and protect the vulnerable population, to leave no one behind.
- *Gender, Youth and Other Cross Cutting Issues Cluster:* Mainstream gender in all development policies & programs and empower women and youth as drivers of growth & nation-building.

The recommendations of strategic cooperation between India and South Sudan depends upon achieving objectives of the India's foreign policy by aligning it with South Sudan's priorities based on the R-NDS of 2021-24 as shown in Table 1 as well as next medium term National Development Plan for the year 2024-28 (also known as NDP II) which is yet to be prepared and it focuses on four strategic challenges including economic diversification, human capital development, transitioning to a green economy and population settlement.

Table 1: Priorities for Revised – National Development Strategy

<u>PRIORITIES: R - NDS</u>	
<u>Constitution, Rule of Law, Security and Peace</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a permanent constitution • Strengthening security institutions and personnel • Build more courts to improve access to justice • Focus on implementing the Peace Agreements 	<u>Macroeconomic Stability</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening public financial management • Manage natural resources • Manage consumption, savings and investment • Promote inclusive growth • Diversify the economy
<u>Economic and Social Development</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a hierarchy of social safety nets • Support education and vocational training • Train and support teachers • Establish clinics and health centers across the <p>Ensure quality and safety of the basic package of health and nutrition services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build national, state and local health systems • Poverty index, and targeted support to reduce • Focus on gender and women's issues • Create jobs 	<u>Governance</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen local governments and devolve powers • Support anticorruption institutions • Reform the public sector • Set up and support national elections bodies • Develop information and communications technology (ICT) and e-governance • Promote women's participation in governance
<u>Infrastructure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade and build new public buildings • Build and rehabilitate roads • Invest in broadband • Develop grid and off-grid energy 	<u>Environment and Climate</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop policy, institution and resources for disaster prevention and response in vulnerable communities • Manage the environment • Reduce the carbon footprint • Address climate vulnerability

Source: Priorities from national consultation "Revised National Development Strategy 2021-2024, Page 37" ¹¹

Strategic Cooperation Alignment Matrix

The matrix (refer Table 2) analyses and demonstrates the alignment of India's efforts of cooperation with South Sudan till date with both India's objectives and South Sudan's NDS. India's efforts are mainly aligned & focused on the Security, political & institutional support, capacity building, HADR, medical assistance and negligible efforts for Infra development, economic development & women empowerment. India's effort which are visible in South

Sudan is majorly through the troop's contribution as part of UNMISS. Still there is a wide gap between development priorities of South Sudan and support provided by India. This matrix becomes the basis for identifying the gaps and scope for developing a strategic cooperation paradigm between the two nations for subsequent cooperation.

Table 2: Strategic Cooperation Alignment Matrix: India – South Sudan (2011 – 2024)

South Sudan's Revised National Development Strategy		India's Strategic Engagement Initiatives	
Cluster	Development Priorities	Initiatives	Categories
Governance (Incl Peace, Security, Law & Justice, Information and communications Technology (ICT))	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen local governments and devolve powers Support anticorruption institutions Reform of civil services Set up and support national election bodies ICT and e-governance Promote women's participation in governance Develop a permanent Constitution Strengthening security institutions and personnel Build more courts to improve access to justice Focus on implementing the Peace Agreement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eight visits & interaction of Government officials including ministers MOU on foreign office consultation (Annual) Interaction at PM and President level in India as well as at other forums South Sudan's minister level delegation visits to India 50 South Sudan police personnel and 65 foreign diplomats trained Indian Peacekeepers in South Sudan – UNMISS and UNISFA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Security Political & Institutional Support Capacity Building Bilateral Diplomatic Engagement
Services Cluster (Social Development: Education, Health & social protection)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a hierarchy of social safety nets Support education Training of teachers and extending support Establishment of clinics and health centers across the nation Ensuring quality services for health and nutrition Building a health ecosystem at national and local levels Monitoring of Poverty index and focus to reduce poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ITEC 200 vacancies given 122 ICCR Scholarship (2019-2024) IAFS -III Scholarships to 43 Students Pan Africa online training in education to include Vidya Bharti and e-Arogya Bharti: 188 students enrolled Distinguished visitor programme Med Tourism Distribution 6 MT medicines worth \$118K Medical and veterinary camps by INDBATT Artificial Limb Fitment Camp - \$180K 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity Building Health & Medical

Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade and build new public buildings • Build and rehabilitate roads Infra – highways, food reserve depots, feeder roads • Control and mgt for airports and Utilization of river • Invest in broadband & make regulations • Develop grid and off-grid energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handpumps for IDP Camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infra Support
Economic Development & Macroeconomic Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening Public Financial Management (PFM) • Manage natural resources – irrigation scheme, water supply scheme • Improve trade avenues • Manage consumption, savings and investment • Diversify the economy – promote agriculture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral Trade from 2016-17 • Imports: 2016 - \$ 0.18 M & 2023 \$ 1.13 M • Export: 2016 - \$ 3.24 M & 2023 - \$ 32.31 M • Investment by OVL in Hydrocarbon Sect - \$ 2.5 B (from 2003 till date) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral Trade • Investments
Gender, Youth & Other Cross Cutting Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on gender and women issues. (Establishment of MSME) • Vocational training to create jobs • Develop policies, institution and resources for disaster prevention and robust response mechanism • Management of environment and climate impacts/challenges • Reduction of the carbon footprint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training as part of capacity building measures • Humanitarian & Food Assistance worth \$265K • Female Engagement Team as part of UNMISS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Building • Women Issues

Recommendations for Strategic Cooperation

India's strategic cooperation with South Sudan should align with South Sudan's R-NDS (2021–2024), NDP-II (2024–2028), and India's Africa policy.

The focus should be on quick-impact, visible projects that support development and strengthen bilateral ties.

- **Governance & Institution Building:** South Sudan continued to face governance issues due to non-elected transitional government, corruption, humanitarian crisis, community

South Sudan continued to face governance issues due to... increasing crime rates which are law and order issues

violences, increasing crime rates which are law and order issues¹². There is a need to strengthen governance & rule of law institutions. India can assist in strengthening democratic and institutional structures.

- *Elections*: Support conduct of first elections by constituting its election commission and conducting elections in remote areas.
- *Finalization of Permanent Written Constitution*: Share expertise in drafting a diverse, inclusive constitution based on India's experience and similar ethnic diversity.
- *Formalising Law & Order System*: India can assist in building a robust judicial system up to the county levels and train judiciary & police, including border security and customs enforcement.
- *Training of Military Personnel*: Indian Army deployed under UNMISS peacekeeping force can impart training to support the reorganization & restructuring of SSPDF.*
- ***Service & Social Development***: South Sudan population is one of the world's lowest in Index of healthcare, sanitation, hygiene and education. It has very high child mortality rate, chronic malnutrition, malaria as an epidemic, weak healthcare system and untrained community health workers. Population has negligible access to safe water and sanitation facilities. Only 41% of the population has access to clean water with non-existence of piped water supply¹³. Half of the population in urban areas and 80% of the population in rural areas defecate in open. 30% of the population in rural areas and 50% of the population in urban areas can read, write & do basic numeracy. Gross enrolment rate (GER) is very low for primary schools, girls & women have very high dropout rates being paternalist communities.¹⁴ The opportunities of strategic cooperation in the areas of social development are as under:
 - *Education*: Renovate rural schools, open Vocational Training Centers (VTCs), expand *E-Vidya Bharti*† programs, and increase scholarships for South Sudanese students.
 - *Healthcare*: Train community health workers, rehabilitate primary health centers, support immunization drives, and supply essential medicines & equipment.
 - *Water & Sanitation*: Install handpumps, build toilets, waste disposal units and set up sanitary pad production & incineration facilities for supporting women's health.
- ***Infra Development***: South Sudan has the poorest connectivity in the world with lowest road density, not all-weather roads, most of the roads are earthen or gravel. Nearly 16% cost of any item covers transportation cost in South Sudan.¹⁵ The highways are

* SSPDF is South Sudan People's Defence Force it was erstwhile Sudan's People Liberation Army (SPLA). As of now majority of troops are from Dinka Tribe and unification of other tribal militia groups is under progress as part of unification of SSPDF.

† E Bharti vidya programs provides online short/long term courses to the youth of African nations.

underdeveloped with poor connectivity with neighboring countries & poor customs at land border ports at Nadapal, Nimule & Kaya create bottlenecks and informal payments, excessive checkpoints & cargo security causes inconvenience to travelers. River as mode of transport has great potential, however, constraint of navigational aid along Nile, lack of docking & cargo handling facilities, inefficiency of vessels and more over high costs makes it less viable option to be used as means of transportation¹⁶. Electricity is again a major challenge with a very less population that is only in urban areas have access to electricity. Population also uses firewood, kerosene, captive generators for light and hydroelectricity has limited grid. Solar introduction has major impact which can be one of the opportunities for India for strategic cooperation.

South Sudan has the poorest connectivity in the world with lowest road density, not all-weather roads, most of the roads are earthen or gravel.

- *Road Construction*: Construct key trade and strategic roads, Juba-Kaya, Juba-Nimule, and Juba-Malakal to enhance mobility and regional trade.
- *River Transportation*: Build river ports and cargo handling facilities on a revenue-sharing model.
- *Tourism Support*: Develop eco-villages along the Nile to promote tourism and attract Indian private sector investment.
- *Electricity*: Support solar and wind power projects to extend rural electrification.
- *Economic Development and Diversification*: South Sudan's Economy is primarily dependent upon crude oil production; it has been impacted by the dispute in Sudan as the crude oil supply route/pipeline is through Sudan. Diversifying economy is key agenda of GRSS by shifting towards agriculture and animal husbandry as the land of South Sudan is fertile and provide opportunity of agriculture at industrial scale which will end the food insecurity of the country¹⁷. India with the experience of green & white revolution can extend the support to the South Sudan in expediting diversification of economy.
- *Agriculture*: Construct canals, storage ponds, and train farmers in modern techniques.
- *Animal Husbandry*: Establish milk, meat, and fish processing infrastructure.
- *Extending Line of Credit*: Facilitate concessional financing via India's ties with Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), Southern African Development Community (SADC), and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)¹⁸.

South Sudan's Economy is primarily dependent upon crude oil production; it has been impacted by the dispute in Sudan as the crude oil supply route/pipeline is through Sudan

- *Information & Communication Technology (ICT)*: Build ICT infrastructure, promote digital governance, and offer technical training.
- *Special Economic Zone (SEZ)*: Assist in developing region-specific Special Economic Zones.
- ***Gender Youth and Other Cross Cutting Issue***: India had always contributed towards capacity building of young population of South Sudan through various programmes to include vacancies in barefoot college, providing scholarship, training of young government officials and cultural exchange programs¹⁹. India has also collaborated towards the crosscutting issues in South Sudan like disaster management and climate change by providing aids. The impact of climate change is highly visible in South Sudan as large number of population is affected by regular floods which lead to displacement and impact the infra development in the region²⁰. India has opportunity to further extend cooperation in the area to tackle climate change impact in South Sudan.

India had always contributed towards capacity building of young population of South Sudan through various programmes to include vacancies...government officials and cultural exchange programs

Indian Army Engineer contingent part of UNMISS has been creating flood mitigation measures for the local population of South Sudan and INDBATTs* have been tasked for HADR support to the local population.

- *Youth Empowerment*: Open skill development centers, offer more scholarships and encourage Indian universities to set up campuses.
- *Gender*: Prioritize women's training, establish girls' schools and promote women empowerment.
- *Disaster Management*: Provide HADR training & equipment, satellite-based disaster monitoring and help set up a national disaster management authority.

Challenges in Strategic Cooperation

Strategic cooperation between India and South Sudan has been affected by several interlinked challenges across political, economic, security, social, environmental, and global governance domains. These issues indirectly delay project implementation and hinder effective bilateral engagement.

- ***Political Challenges***: India and South Sudan both recognize each other sovereignty and shares similar culture as well as ideology being erstwhile colonies. Both countries understand the importance of Independence. The political challenges impacting cooperation include:

* INDBATT are Indian Battalion contingents of Indian Army deployed in South Sudan for peacekeeping operations.

- *Weak Government Institution:* South Sudan's transitional government is built on a fragile coalition with competing interests. Without stable, elected leadership, long-term cooperation remains uncertain.
- *Limited Bilateral Engagement:* Political interactions between both nations have been minimal - only eight official visits or exchanges, with head of state level meetings occurring only in 2011 and 2015. Regular diplomatic engagement is essential for deepening bilateral ties.
- *Security Challenges:* The country continues to face internal conflict, ethnic tensions, and insecurity due to armed groups. These factors disrupt development and investment efforts. A stable security environment is a prerequisite for any strategic cooperation
- *Economic Challenges:* South Sudan has one of the weakest economies globally, it is overly dependent on oil revenues, which are poorly managed. GRSS has planned diversification into agriculture and livestock that offers limited returns and there is limited thought for establishing industries due to lack of infrastructure, low productivity, and funding shortages. India, as a developing country, needs viable returns to justify investments. Hence, South Sudan must improve its economic management and offer a more secure investment environment.
- *Social and Cultural Challenges:* Issues like internal displacement, low literacy, gender-based violence, and ethnic divisions affect social stability and limit human capital development. These barriers reduce the effectiveness of social cooperation projects and community-level engagement.
- *Environmental Challenges:* South Sudan is increasingly affected by climate change, especially flooding and irregular rainfall, which directly impact infrastructure and agriculture. India's investments must prioritize environmental sustainability to ensure long-term success.
- *Global Governance Challenges:* South Sudan's geopolitical landscape is influenced by competing global interests. China has entrenched itself through major oil and infrastructure investments. India's cooperation with South Sudan has been impacted by the China's interest in the region.
 - The China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) owns a 41 % stake in South Sudan's oil sector.²¹
 - China-backed projects, including an oil pipeline to Djibouti²² and the LAPSSET* Corridor²³, may reshape regional trade and limit India's strategic space. Both the projects have consent of GRSS, giving China favourable spot in region.

* LAPSSET is Lamu Port (Kenya)– South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport Corridor planned in 2013 and work started in 2019, project is worth \$25 Billion which is nearly stalled.

Way Ahead for Strategic Partnership

In a competitive and multipolar world, India must seize global opportunities, particularly in emerging markets like South Sudan – especially to address its negative Balance of Trade (BoT)[†]. Aligning with its Africa foreign policy, India should pursue a strategic, multi-sectoral partnership with South Sudan, focusing on the following priority areas from the recommendations of strategic cooperation:

● Trade & Investments

- **Oil production & Exploration:** South Sudan, the only oil-producing country in East Africa, presents vast untapped reserves (90% unexplored). India's ONGC Videsh Limited (OVL) already holds significant stakes in oil ventures. India should expand exploration and consider co-funding a \$3 billion refinery in Block 5A to boost output for which GRSS is looking for investors since March 2024²⁴, this can even facilitate the regional exports to petroleum product to Kenya, Uganda and Republic of Congo. Supporting South Sudan in oil revenue management will also ensure sustainable economic growth.
- **Agriculture & Food Processing:** South Sudan urgently needs to diversify its oil-dependent economy. One key opportunity lies in transforming from a food-deficit to a food-surplus nation through a green revolution. India can be a strategic partner in this transformation by supporting agriculture as an industry. India could provide training to farmers and help monitor initial production cycles & developing food processing industry that will ensure food security of South Sudan.
- **Capacity Building:** India should continue aiding South Sudan in capacity building by offering training to government officials, scholarships, student exchanges, and vocational education aligned with its skill development programs. Training healthcare workers, empowering women, and supporting primary education will help India connect with South Sudan at the grassroots. This soft power approach enhances India's image and builds a future market while aligning with South Sudan's Revitalized National Development Strategy (R-NDS).
- **Foundational Reforms:** India can support key reforms such as drafting a permanent constitution, establishing a judicial system, aiding in election commission setup and helping reorganize the armed forces to be more professional and effective.
- **Traction & Impact:** India should focus on impactful infrastructure projects aligned with R-NDS, including:
 - **Construction of Roads:** Improving roads, especially those connecting the capital with border points, is vital for trade in this landlocked country.

[†] BoT is the difference between Import and exports of a country in a period.

- *Land Ports*: Establishing ports on borders with Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Sudan will boost connectivity, it will support India's export through Kenyan ports to South Sudan.
- *Solar & Wind Electricity Projects*: Solar and wind projects can attract Indian companies and bring sustainable energy solutions.
- *Irrigation Canal and Water Supply Scheme*: Irrigation canals and water supply schemes will support agriculture, livestock, and flood control as the full potential of Nile River remain unutilized.

Conclusion

India and South Sudan enjoy strong ties, but aligning support with South Sudan's R-NDS can boost development and partnership. South Sudan must ensure stability to fully benefit from cooperation. India should focus on opportunities in energy sector, agriculture, capacity building, foundational reforms and infrastructure projects that provides traction & aligned with the country's current needs and long-term growth goals.

-
- ¹ "India-South Sudan Bilateral Relations", Embassy of India, Juba, South Sudan, 2023, Microsoft Word - Bilateral Brief for website Sept 2023 (2) (Accessed on 25 September 2024).
 - ¹ Ibid.
 - ² "MoU on Consultations between India and South Sudan" , Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 22 February 2019, Treaty Detail | Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (Accessed on 20 October 2025).
 - ³ "Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan," I.G.A.D, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 12 September 2018, IGAD South Sudan Office - Signed Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (Accessed on 20 September 2024).
 - ⁴ "Revised National Development Strategy 2021-2024, Page 12-17," Government of South Sudan, Juba, 2021, South-Sudan-NDS_Print-14-June-2022.pdf (Accessed on 20 March 2025).
 - ⁵ Ibid.
 - ⁶ Ruchita Beri, "Indian Foreign Policy and Africa: Continuity and Change," IDSA, 2023, Indian Foreign Policy and Africa: Continuity and Change (Accessed on 25 September 2024).
 - ⁷ HHH Viswanathan and Abhishek Mishra, "The Ten Guiding Principles for India Africa Engagement", ORF Occasional Paper, vol. Occasional Paper 200, 2019, The ten guiding principles for India-Africa engagement: Finding coherence in India's Africa policy (Accessed on 25 September 2024).
 - ⁸ Paul Nantulaya, "Africa - India Cooperation Sets Benchmark for partnership", African Center for Strategic Studies, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-india-cooperation-benchmark-partnership/> , 12 December 2023 (Accessed on 25 September 2024).
 - ⁹ Government of South Sudan, No. 5.
 - ¹⁰ Ibid.
 - ¹¹ UNDP, "Access to Justice, Security and Human Rights Strengthening Programme in South Sudan," Annual Report, 2023, Annual Report 2023: Access to Justice, Security and Human Rights Strengthening Programme in South Sudan | United Nations Development Programme (Accessed on 01 October 2024).

- ¹² "Republic of South Sudan Interim country Strategy Paper (I-CSP) 2022-2024", African Development Bank Group, Juba, November 2021, south_sudan_-_interim_country_strategy_paper_2022-2024.pdf (Accessed on 01 October 2024).
- ¹³ "Systematic Country Diagnostic," Report Number - 99383-SS, Country Department, Eastern Africa-3, World Bank Group, 05 Oct 2015, World Bank Document (Accessed on 01 October 2024).
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ African Development Bank Group, no.13.
- ¹⁶ "Strengthening Agricultural Value Chains : Opportunities and challenges," Policy Brief, UNDP, 2023, Policy Brief: Strengthening Agricultural Value Chains & AfCFTA Linkages in South Sudan: Opportunities and Challenges | United Nations Development Programme (Accessed on 05 October 2024).
- ¹⁷ Paul Nantulaya, no.9.
- ¹⁸ Embassy of India, South Sudan, no. 1.
- ¹⁹ Government of South Sudan, "Interim National Communication to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change", 2018, South Sudan INC.pdf (Accessed on 20 March 2025).
- ²⁰ Memi Mefo Newuh and Eddy Micah Jr, "South Sudan: Can oil production save the economy?," DW : Politics, <https://www.dw.com/en/south-sudan-can-oil-production-save-the-economy/a-71345060> , 30 Jan 2025 (Accessed on 25 March 2025).
- ²¹ "South Sudan seeks Chinese funding for alternative oil pipeline," Sudan Tribune, <https://sudantribune.com/article290390/> , 04 September 2024 (accessed on 25 Mar 2025).
- ²² Stradiotti, "The LAPSET Corridor's Transformative Role," African Association of Enterprenuers, <https://aaeafrica.org/east-africa/the-lapsset-corridors-transformative-role/> , East Africa, 25 Mar 2025 (Accessed on 20 April 2025).
- ²³ Mathew Goosen, "South Sudan Seeks Investments for New Oil Refinery," Energy Capital and Power, <https://energycapitalpower.com/south-sudan-seeks-investors-oil-refinery/> , 28 March 2024 (Accessed on 05 October 2024).

Viewpoint

THE CYCLES OF VIOLENCE THAT HAVE FUELLED BURKINA FASO'S INSECURITY

Burkina Faso, once among Africa's most peaceful states, has become the world's most terrorism-impacted country, driven by cyclical violence between jihadists, state forces, and self-defense militias. This paper examines how indiscriminate and ethnically targeted violence, particularly against the Fulani, has fuelled al-Qaeda's Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) expansion. Under Captain Ibrahim Traoré, the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP) have become central to counterterrorism efforts, yet their rapid expansion has coincided with escalating atrocities. The March 2025 "Solenzo massacre" triggered JNIM's "revenge" campaign, showcasing the group's capacity to attack and temporarily occupy urban centres. Traoré's domestically focused but repressive strategy has deepened insecurity, enabling JNIM to advance its governance ambitions. By analysing the role of persecuted communities, militia centrality, and state violence, this study argues that Burkina Faso's counterproductive tactics have entrenched insurgency and offer critical lessons for regional and international actors confronting extremism in the Sahel and Gulf of Guinea.

Charlie Werb*

Burkina Faso has been the world's most impacted country by terrorism for the past two years¹, despite recording its first ever attack less than ten years ago. Among the root causes of the country's worsening security crisis is the state's response to militant expansion. As jihadist activity in the country grew, the Burkinabé armed forces and self-defense militias increasingly resorted to indiscriminate and often ethnically motivated violence against civilians, fueling cycles of violence that have intensified dramatically in recent months. This violence - primarily impacting pastoralist groups such as the Fulani - has been leveraged by al-Qaeda's Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), enabling it to consolidate control over swathes of the country.

Burkina Faso is now struggling to contain a self-perpetuating insurgency, which has directly contributed to the fall of three former administrations; extremist violence has also motivated

* He is currently serving as a Senior Analyst with Aldebaran Threat Consultants, focusing on West Africa and based in Dakar.

Burkina Faso is now struggling to contain a self-perpetuating insurgency, which has directly contributed to the fall of three former administrations; extremist violence has also motivated numerous attempts to depose the country's current leader, Captain Ibrahim Traoré.

organisation”³.

Throughout his rule, the young leader has frequently levelled blame for his country's growing insecurity on external actors, a move ostensibly motivated by a desire to divert attention away from his fundamentally flawed counterterrorism strategy. Under his two predecessors, the Burkinabè armed forces had been receiving significant amounts of funding, training, arms, intelligence, advisors, air support, and ground support from Western partners such as France, the US, among others⁴. After seizing power in September 2022, Traoré quickly

Traoré quickly abandoned Western military support in favour of homegrown responses - a popular strategy that has paradoxically coincided with worsening insecurity.

abandoned Western military support in favour of homegrown responses - a popular strategy that has paradoxically coincided with worsening insecurity.

This paper argues that the role of violence against civilians by state-affiliated forces is central to understanding Burkina Faso's acute levels of extremist violence. Although these dynamics pre-date Traoré's rule, his domestically focused counterterrorism strategy has accelerated cyclical conflict. By examining the role of persecuted communities, the increasing centrality of self-defense militias, and a sequence of events that began in March 2025, this essay will demonstrate that Traoré has played a far more direct role in worsening his country's security landscape than his predecessors - enabling JNIM to advance its aims of conquering and administering territory.

The Fulani's Outsized Role in Burkina Faso's Crisis

In late 2016, Ansaroul Islam - a JNIM affiliate founded by the Fulani preacher Malam Dicko - publicly emerged in Burkina Faso. Since then, Dicko's group, along with Katiba Macina, a JNIM branch from central Mali led by another Fulani preacher, have expanded across Burkina Faso by exploiting the social, political, and economic exclusion primarily experienced by rural communities⁵. Their rhetoric has strongly appealed to young men throughout the country - particularly amongst those from the lower castes of long-excluded communities such as the Fulani, a semi-nomadic pastoralist group⁶. Consequently, despite constituting a small portion of Burkina Faso's population, the Fulani have become overrepresented in the ranks of jihadist groups⁷.

While the overrepresentation of the Fulani shows that some do join, or at least cooperate, with extremists, deep-set grievances with the state and fellow communities provide only a fraction of the explanation. As jihadist violence grew, soldiers and self-defense militiamen increasingly resorted to indiscriminate violence against local communities perceived to be complicit - to eliminate perceived threats, get revenge for fallen comrades, or a combination of both. With security forces - particularly community self-defense groups - primarily composed of men from sedentary communities, the Fulani and other pastoralist communities were the main recipients of these atrocities⁸.

Many of the civilians targeted by this violence were not involved with jihadists, and those who were often did so out of fear of being attacked. Caught between two armed groups - one claiming to be their protector, the other threatening their existence - it is little surprise that some have sided with jihadists. By 2021 - the last full year before Traoré took power - Burkina Faso's state security personnel and self-defense militias were responsible for almost half of the victims killed that year by all violent actors in the country - many of whom were civilians⁹.

Throughout the course of Burkina Faso's enduring security crisis, neither the state nor its Western partners at the time were willing - or able - to rein in these counterproductive tactics¹⁰. However, while Traoré's break from Western partners is often cited for exacerbating the crisis, it is his doubling down on these self-defeating tactics which began during their involvement that has pushed Burkina Faso deeper into chaos.

Violence Accelerates in Tandem with The VDP's Growing Importance

With the armed forces struggling to contain the mounting threat, despite their support from Western partners, local self-defense groups - who the state had outsourced the provision of security to for decades - became increasingly central to the country's battle against terrorism. In January 2020, then-President Roch Kaboré expanded the size of these groups and integrated them into the national counterterrorism strategy by recognising them as the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (or Les Volontaires pour la défense de la Patrie or VDP). Despite their burgeoning importance, VDP personnel would still only receive two or three weeks of basic training before being sent to the frontlines¹¹.

In January 2020, then-President Roch Kaboré expanded the size of these groups ... recognising them as the Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland...

Unsurprisingly, the expansion and formalisation of these groups did little to arrest the deterioration of Burkina Faso's security landscape. Within two years of the VDP's official recognition, Kaboré was replaced by Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba via a coup d'état. Damiba recognised the multifaceted drivers behind his country's issues and attempted to remedy insecurity through a broad spectrum of violent and non-violent initiatives. The former leader quickly accused the VDP of carrying out abuses; however, faced with dire circumstances on the ground, he was able only to try and implement improved oversight rather than disband these groups entirely¹².

Damiba was overthrown by Captain Traoré just eight months into his reign, following a series of damaging attacks in quick succession.¹³ The VDP quickly became a cornerstone of Traoré's strategy, with the new leader almost immediately expanding the civilian force by an additional 50,000 personnel - double the number of the army - through public donations. Compensating for his lack of electoral legitimacy, deep connections, and political experience enjoyed by his predecessors, the decision to empower civilians played a key role in solidifying Traoré's rule¹⁴. Yet despite these net positives, the VDP's expansion led to a dramatic rise in attacks on civilians across the country¹⁵. The hazardous byproduct of this policy was exposed again this March, with VDP atrocities against civilians legitimising a wave of JNIM violence that has rocked the country.

JNIM's 'Revenge for Solenzo' Offensive

Experiencing a 38 percent increase in fatalities in 2024 on the year prior - the most of any region in Burkina Faso - the Boucle du Mouhoun region has become an epicenter of violence over the past 18 months. This uptick has been caused by a large-scale, deadly offensive led by the Katiba Macina battalion¹⁶, as well as the response of the Burkinabé armed forces.

Beginning in late February, Operation *Green Whirlwind 2* was initiated by hundreds of VDP and led by several Rapid Battalion Units (BIR), which, like the civilian auxiliary force, have undergone a major expansion as part of Traoré's homegrown response. On 10 and 11 March, reports surfaced that security forces had successfully reclaimed territory around the city of Solenzo. Pro-government accounts online were quick to praise the operation, claiming militants had suffered devastating losses. However, evidence quickly emerged online showing dozens of dead men, women, and children, alongside many others alive, some visibly wounded and tied up. Pictured around them were men wearing VDP uniforms. One piece of footage saw a man exclaim, "You, the Fulani people, do you think you can take over Burkina Faso? You will never! What is left for you to do here is to disappear. Where are those holding weapons?"¹⁷.

The barbarity of this event quickly garnered international attention, even though Burkinabè security forces have been carrying out similar acts of violence for almost a decade. The government doubled down on its support for its forces, claiming that a disinformation campaign had misrepresented the events to incite communal violence and destabilise the country. Indeed, acknowledging the failures of his security forces, particularly the VDP, is not an option for Traoré, for they are a core pillar of his support. *Human Rights Watch* later reported that the armed forces had directed atrocities and human rights abuses, indicating that the systematic targeting of civilians has become more entrenched under Traoré's rule¹⁸.

As it has done so consistently since its arrival in Burkina Faso, JNIM quickly moved to exploit the acts of violence. Shortly after the reports emerged, Ousmane Dicko - brother of Jaafar Dicko, leader of the Ansarul Islam - gave a several minute-long speeches in which he pledged to get revenge for the government's persistent killings of civilians, regardless of their identity. JNIM's retributive campaign began almost immediately¹⁹. Between 13-16 March alone, over 100 soldiers and VDP personnel were killed in 13 attacks across the country²⁰,

according to conflict analysis group WAMAPS. Then on 28 March, an attack on a base in Diapaga killed 60 others²¹. Less than a week later, JNIM attacked villages in Sourou, slaughtering around 100 men and boys who were allegedly seeking to join the VDP²².

JNIM Showcases New Offensive Capabilities

JNIM's self-named revenge for Solenzo campaign continued well into May and June 2025 but escalated significantly in terms of lethality and devastation via attacks on two provincial capitals. On 11 May 2025, JNIM launched an unprecedented assault on the besieged city of Djibo, which was one of eight attacks across the country on that day alone. The results were devastating; conservative estimates suggest that at least 100 civilians, soldiers, and soldiers were killed in Djibo. Compounding the devastating effect of the attack in Djibo were humiliating images of JNIM members posing in front of a portrait of Captain Traoré in an administrative office, which stood as a visual demonstration of the country's decline under his rule²³.

Days later, JNIM struck Diapaga, an urban centre in the country's east. Although the group did not inflict the same levels of bloodshed as were seen in Djibo, the results were nonetheless highly damaging for the military regime, with militants once again able to roam freely around the city and pose symbolically in front of landmarks. The message of these two attacks was clear: JNIM, a once largely rural group, now holds the capacity to attack and temporarily occupy Burkina Faso's urban areas.

...JNIM, a once largely rural group, now holds the capacity to attack and temporarily occupy Burkina Faso's urban areas.

JNIM's evolution has been fuelled by acts of violence against civilians such as those witnessed near Solenzo this year, without them, JNIM's current position would likely be far less advantageous, as they have fuelled civilian support for the group at the expense of the state. By claiming its latest campaign was launched in revenge for the atrocities, JNIM not only justified its acts of violence to a domestic audience, but also the wider international community - showcasing the group's growth from a small local actor to one powerful enough to legitimise its violence to the wider international community. The motivations for JNIM's framing are clear. Having gathered momentum over the past decade, the group is now advancing toward its grandiose political, religious, and social aims and is capable of directly challenging the Sahel's military governments.

Conclusion

One of the primary drivers of Burkina Faso's deteriorating security landscape is a self-perpetuating conflict involving state-affiliated forces, civilians, and jihadists. Playing a role in three successful coup d'états - the latest of which prompted the country's geopolitical realignment - the repercussions of these dynamics have reverberated far beyond the country's borders. Domestically, JNIM's major offensive this year - framed as retaliation for atrocities committed by government-aligned forces - coincided with yet another plot to depose Captain Traoré. As the Traoré government's attempts to maintain control over the country are faltering,

the al-Qaeda branch is attempting to lay the foundations for social, political, and religious governance - casting an ominous shadow over the country.

Burkina Faso was once considered one of Africa's most peaceful nations, yet within the space of a decade, it has descended to become the most impacted country in the world by terrorism. The country's demise illustrates how jihadist groups leverage deep-rooted grievances and exploit state violence to advance their expansionist aims. These patterns of behaviour are not unique. They are fuelling insurgencies across the region. As JNIM proliferates through the Sahel, it now has the Gulf of Guinea states firmly in its crosshairs - some of whom are continuing to make similar mistakes in their approach to combatting extremism.

For Western governments engaging with the Gulf of Guinea states and beyond, Burkina Faso provides a critical lesson: support for security forces carrying out indiscriminate, extrajudicial violence can be as damaging as no support altogether.

For Western governments engaging with the Gulf of Guinea states and beyond, Burkina Faso provides a critical lesson: support for security forces carrying out indiscriminate, extrajudicial violence can be as damaging as no support altogether. Indeed, the Western community's failed counterterrorism intervention in Burkina Faso and the central Sahel has provided JNIM the opportunity to join the Taliban and Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) in transitioning from a terrorist group into a governing authority. While JNIM's state-building ambitions remain ongoing, Burkina Faso's enduring cycles of violence in the country suggest this outcome is by no means implausible.

-
- ¹ Harriet Orrell, "The region with more 'terror deaths' than rest of world combined", BBC, News, 5 March 2025. (Accessed 22 May 2025).
 - ² Daniel Eizanga, "Burkina Faso's Ibrahim Traoré is making waves in west Africa. Who is he?", The Conversation, 20 February 2025. (Accessed 5 June 2025).
 - ³ Wycliffe Muia, "Burkina Faso army says it foiled 'major' coup plot", BBC News, 22 April 2025. (Accessed 28 April 2025).
 - ⁴ Stephanie Savell, "U.S. Security Assistance to Burkina Faso Laid the Groundwork for a Coup", Foreign Policy, 3 February 2022. (Accessed 27 May 2025).
 - ⁵ Hénri Nsaibia & Caleb Weiss, "Ansaroul Islam and the Growing Terrorist Insurgency in Burkina Faso", Combating Terrorism Centre, 29 March 2028. (Accessed 1 June 2025)
 - ⁶ Loïc Bisson et al, "Between hope and despair", Clingendael Institute, February 2021. (Accessed 17 May 2025).
 - ⁷ Michael DeAngelo, "Counterterrorism Shortcomings in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger", Foreign Policy Research Institute, 3 March 2025. (Accessed 30 April 2025).
 - ⁸ Liam Karr, "Africa File, Critical Threats, 15 May 2025. (Accessed 9 June 2025).
 - ⁹ Stephanie Savell, "U.S. Security Assistance to Burkina Faso Laid the Groundwork for a Coup", Foreign Policy, 3 February 2022. (Accessed 30 May 2025).

- ¹⁰ Nick Turse, "How One of the Most Stable Nations in West Africa Descended into Mayhem", *The New York Times Magazine*, 15/ October 2020. (Accessed 2 June 2025).
- ¹¹ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Actor Profile: Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP)", ACLED, 26/ March 2024. (Accessed 17 May 2025).
- ¹² Crisis Group, "Burkina Faso: Arming Civilians at the Cost of Social Cohesion?", Crisis Group, 15 December 2023. (Accessed 29 May 2025).
- ¹³ Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, "Actor Profile: Volunteers for the Defense of the Homeland (VDP)", ACLED, 26/ March 2024. (Accessed 17 May 2025).
- ¹⁴ Abdoul Karim Saidou & Lauren Honig, "Legitimising regimes and legalising self-defence groups: the case of Burkina Faso's VDPs", Cambridge University Press. (Accessed 13 May 2025).
- ¹⁵ Liam Karr, "Africa File, 15 May 2025", *Critical Threats*, 15 May 2025. (Accessed 9 June 2025).
- ¹⁶ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "The Shifting Front of Militant Islamist Violence/ in/ the/ Sahel", Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 7 April 2025. (Accessed 10 May 2025).
- ¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, "Burkina Faso: Government-Allied Militias Linked to Massacre", HRW, 14 March 2025. (Accessed 16 April 2025).
- ¹⁸ Human Rights Watch, "Burkina Faso: Army Directs Ethnic Massacres", HRW, 12 May 2025. (Accessed 1 June 2025).
- ¹⁹ Wassim Nasr, <https://x.com/SimNasr/status/1900553561513017565>, x.com, 14 March 2025. (Accessed 27 May 2025).
- ²⁰ West Africa Maps, https://x.com/Wamaps_news/status/1902024355296547310, x.com, 18 March 2025. (Accessed 22 May 2025).
- ²¹ France24, "Le Burkina Faso frappé par une attaque djihadiste à Diapaga dans l'est du pays", France24, 30 March 2025. (Accessed 2 June 2025).
- ²² RFI, "Burkina Faso: des attaques meurtrières menées contre trois villages de la province de Sourou", RFI, 5 April 2025. (Accessed 12 May 2025).
- ²³ Mathieu Pellerin, "Major Jihadist Attack Exposes Military Failings in Burkina Faso", Crisis Group, 15 May 2025. (Accessed 29 May 2025).

Book Review

Seifuddin Adem, *Africa's Quest for Modernity: Lessons from Japan and China, Switzerland: Springer Nature Switzerland AG (2023) pp. 269 (+xvi)*

ISBN (ebook): 9783031236549

Dr. Arnab Dasgupta*

The volume under review draws from noted scholar Ali Mazrui's definition of modernisation, which integrates epistemic advancements with capability-based arguments. It looks to East and Southeast Asia as models for Africa's development. As he states in his introduction, Africa 'has to be able to conscript both China and Japan' in service of its developmental goals (p. 5). He argues that 'Africa can partner with China and learn from Japan' while being cognisant of the diversity of developmental paths in East and Southeast Asia.

...Africa 'has to be able to conscript both China and Japan' in service of its developmental goals...

The first core section of the volume under review discusses the relevance of China's developmental paradigm for Africa. Imaginatively, the author counters Western 'Sino-pessimism' by suggesting that the Chinese development paradigm may in fact be more relevant to African needs, because China and Africa can be characterised justly as vast agglomerations of peoples and cultures 'masquerading as' states.

Chinese development paradigm may in fact be more relevant to African needs, because China and Africa can be characterised justly as vast agglomerations of peoples and cultures 'masquerading as' states.

Ensuing chapters within the first section concern themselves with Chinese intentions towards Africa. Advising ample caution in accepting over-credulous 'Sino-optimistic' narratives, the author argues that China can display primarily two kinds of agency that could realise the optimists' expectation. The first envisages Beijing as an impartial arbiter that can potentially 'encourage genuine ethnic power-sharing in Africa' (p. 44), which could help negate the unfortunate partition imposed on the continent in 1899. The second holds that Beijing could help African states access the corridors of

power in both existing as well as emerging international organisations.

* Research Analyst, East Asia Centre, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA),

Turning to Japan in the third section of the volume, the author engages in a thick analysis of Japan's education and political systems in order to unearth 'software' that he deems critical to Africa's developmental path. A thorough analysis of Japan's education system leads him to the conclusion that that country's modernisation had as much to do with the retention of its traditional cultural norms as with adoption of Western technology. He further infers that Africa, which he argues is over-reliant on Western political-economic ideologies, would do well to pay attention to cultural factors as well.

The author's analysis of political governance and power transition within Japan guides him to the conclusion that Japan's history of 'revolving-door' politics, wherein Prime Ministers seemingly rotate terms annually, is testament to the fact that peaceful transfer of power is so institutionalised that actors within the party system do not hesitate to relinquish it. He states that this 'political recycling', as he calls it, implies a positive-sum calculation by elite actors that they still have a place within the system even if they step down from positions of actual authority. This is positively contrasted with African countries' propensity to dictatorship, which he argues is driven by zero-sum calculations.

The volume as a whole is a laudable initiative, insofar as it represents an autochthonous African effort to develop a development model that can realistically be implemented across the continent. From a programmatic perspective, there is little to criticise; indeed, the author's deep engagement with Ali Mazrui's work is critical to his project. His choice of East Asian models is also redolent of his deep personal engagement with the region.

If one must criticise any aspect of the volume under review, this critique must take the shape of two distinct threads. The first can be quickly dealt with. The structure of the volume is not well-thought out, and chapters and parts do not follow logical succession. As a result, points overlap, discussions are repeated and sections of certain chapters jar within the part structure. Relatedly, the author ends up using too many theoretical paradigms and inventing too many neologisms, especially in the latter half of the volume. This makes it difficult to follow the skein of his arguments for any length of time.

The second critique is more substantial. This reviewer does not use the word Orientalist lightly, but certain parts of the author's analysis do reek of it. One key example may be sufficient here. The author is keen to credit groupism as a key feature of Japanese education, which he traces uncritically to deep-rooted cultural origins. This attribution not only negates the long history among the Japanese people of resistance to the authority of the group, it also risks essentialising current differences in Japanese society, which seek to maintain varying degrees of distance from its invisible tyranny.

A related concern is the author's overreliance of groupism as an explanatory factor in Japanese

encourages the kind of zero-sum calculations the author sees as a negative in the continent's politicians. While Japanese politicians can afford to be positive-sum given the paucity of shared resources, Africa's resources do not lend themselves to such generosity

success. He vastly underestimates the importance of environmental factors in shaping Japanese societal choices. Residing in a terrain devoid of significant natural resources and plagued by population-destroying natural calamities, grouping instincts have exerted an evolutionary logic on the Japanese people, who were forced to cooperate in order to eke out an existence. On the contrary, Africa's 'resource curse' positively encourages the kind of zero-sum calculations the author sees as a negative in the continent's politicians. While Japanese politicians can afford to be positive-sum given the paucity of shared resources, Africa's resources do not lend themselves to such generosity. Culture, in the sense he uses

it, thus may not be very relevant in changing behaviours, barring the disappearance of the environmental imperative.

Africa must 'partner with Japan and learn from India ... accountable to genuine inter-ethnic linkage.

Another critical factor that ought to inhibit Japan's suitability as a development paradigm for Africa is that Japan, unlike Africa, is not 'a conglomerate of formally differentiated units with immense variations'. It has never

developed the set of tools necessary to accommodate ethnic differences domestically, as is plentifully evident in its disastrous policies toward not only the Ainu and the Okinawans, but also towards Asians during World War Two and migrants today. As a result, while Japan may successfully implement 'political recycling', this process is incumbent on the suppression of ethnic difference. Seen in this light, the author's initial formulation may be rephrased to reflect a better set of models: Africa must 'partner with Japan and learn from India (and China where relevant)' in order to achieve development that is egalitarian while being accountable to genuine inter-ethnic linkage.

Call for Contributions

MP-IDSA invites articles, commentaries and book reviews for publication in *Africa Trends*, a biannual magazine on Africa. Submissions can focus on security, political and economic issues relating to African countries. Articles may focus on analysing bilateral, regional and multilateral developments of strategic significance to India's engagement with African countries.

Articles could be of approximately 2000 words. Commentaries can range between 1,000-1,500 words (excluding footnotes) and book reviews between 600-1,000 words. Guidelines for contributors may be found at: <http://www.idsa.in/africatrends>. Submissions may be emailed to the Editor at idsa.africatrends@gmail.com.

About Africa, Latin America, Caribbean & UN Centre MP-IDSA

The Centre's research focus includes understanding developments in the African region and analysing various hotspots like Egypt, Libya, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and the Indian Ocean Region. It also focuses on bilateral, regional as well as multilateral engagements between India and the countries of Africa. The Centre also endeavours to analyse India's engagement with Latin American countries, particularly in forums such as the IBSA and BRICS.

In addition, the Centre carries out research on the broader theme of India and the United Nations. It deals with important topics that come up in the Security Council and those that have relevance and significance for India's foreign policy.

Cover page courtesy: Dr Saurabh Mishra & Ms Geeta



Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg,

Delhi Cantt., New Delhi - 110 010

Tel.: (91-11) 2671-7983 Fax: (91-11) 2615 4191

Website: <http://www.idsa.in>