

# A CASE FOR STRENGTHENING INDIA-AFRICA PARTNERSHIP

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The India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) process has come a full circle. Launched in April 2009 in New Delhi and followed by the second summit in May 2011 in Addis Ababa, the third summit in New Delhi in October 2015 will complete the cycle that began over seven years ago. While this process was partly in response to initiatives by other emerging powers, such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation launched in 2000, it was also a belated recognition that Africa was becoming an indispensable continent for India's future; one that New Delhi could ignore at its own detriment.

Simultaneously, individual African nations as well as the African Union (AU) increasingly look to India as a potential partner for their own future. India's growing economy, especially its need for resources, its role as a net security provider, its competitive health and education sectors, its agricultural, business, infrastructure, and training prowess, apart from its tacit counterbalance to China, the United States and its allies also makes India attractive for African countries.

Though the process was initiated by emphasizing the "decades-old partnership and historical and civilizational links between the African continent and India", especially in the "struggle for independence, equality, human rights, freedom and democracy," it has widened and deepened to reflect the multifaceted nature of the relationship. Today Africa and India fit into each other's worldview in at least four ways:

First is the common historical African and Indian experience of colonization and decolo-

nization. Derived from that is the normative notion and principle of independent, sovereign states committed to the liberal peace paradigm. This was evident in the historic soft power approach that promoted sovereignty, independence and support for the liberal model of development. This Indo-African relationship primarily stemmed from Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership and firm stance against colonialism, imperialism and hegemony by colonial powers in the African continent. The Panchsheel principles of peaceful existence based on mutual respect, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, which were adopted at the Bandung Conference in 1955 have remained one pillar of the Indo-African relationship, though they are less significant to the AU nations, which are increasingly concerned about security and development even if this comes at the expense of sovereignty and non-intervention.

India's soft power approach in Africa is also reinforced through the significant Indian diaspora that exists in the African continent. In the past, despite around two million people of Indian origin living in Africa, the Indian government did not officially grant the community any political, diplomatic or economic relevance in India. Until recently, anti-Asian sentiments in Africa also resulted in the policy of maintaining a distance from the Indian community. However, the Indian government is now taking significant efforts to revise this policy. The most recent example of this outreach has been the initiation of an 'Overseas Indian Facilitation Centre' by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2010 geared toward

promoting economic ties. In October 2010 a mini Pravasi Bharatiya Divas-Africa was held in Durban, along with other celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured Indian labourers. The Narendra Modi government also appears to be continuing this approach especially given the fairly successful outreach to the Indian diaspora in other regions of the world, particularly North America and the Middle East. In the run up to the third summit the Modi government has launched a high profile mobile exhibition to mark the centenary of the return from South Africa of India's most prominent "pravasi" – Mohandas Gandhi.

However, the 'identity' issue of the Indian diaspora in Africa is more complex than that in other regions of the world. Having settled in Africa for generations, Indian diaspora in countries like Kenya relate more to their 'African' identity than their 'Indian' identity. This is bound to complicate Indian efforts to propagate diaspora diplomacy in Africa.

Second, following India's economic liberalization from 1991 onwards, Africa has emerged and is likely to remain crucial for natural resources and developing markets. This is evident in the increasing trade between the two. In the past five years alone India-Africa trade has grown six-fold to nearly \$70 billion. India is now Africa's fourth largest trading partner. Crude oil and gas has emerged as the leading export to India, accounting for nearly two-thirds of all exports, while gold and other precious metals account for about 16 percent. It is significant to note that Nigeria recently replaced Saudi Arabia as the largest crude supplier to India, for the first time in the last four years. India's oil imports from Africa rose from 15.5 percent in April 2015 to 26 percent in May 2015 with supplies coming mainly from Nigeria and Angola. This exponential increase in India-Africa trade has also been a principal driver behind India's evolving concept of development partnership cooperation and is the key approach for engagement with Africa since 2003.

In terms of development cooperation or partnership, India has been an early development actor in Africa, though its contribution was limited in capacity. However, since at least 2003 India has emerged as a key development actor in Africa and this role is likely to expand significantly. Both globally and in Africa, India is a strong proponent of south-south cooperation as well as continued north-south cooperation. This is on account of its limited capacity but also the principle of ensuring that the north contributes to sustainable development in the south.

The extent of Africa's importance in the Indian development cooperation strategy is underlined by promise of Lines of Credit (LOCs) worth over US \$8 billion made to African countries between 2008 and 2011 (of which \$2 billion has been disbursed already). The LOCs have financed a wide range of projects in agriculture, irrigation, food processing, rural electrification, IT and infrastructure projects like railways, cement and power. The credit lines are extended through the Export and Import Bank of India (EXIM) and 50 per cent of its lending has gone to sub-Saharan Africa with over 40 African countries having availed it. African countries currently constitute a prominent position in Indian development cooperation efforts, receiving about 53 percent of the operative LOCs. It is true that in absolute numbers, the Indian development assistance is not commensurate with other actors in Africa, such as China and the United States. However, India is promoting the concept that its development cooperation is based on a partnership of mutual benefit and therefore is closely tied to commercial interests in trade and investment. India's development cooperation is theoretically demand-driven and therefore considered more egalitarian and less exploitive in nature. While this concept has still to be put into wide practice, the value of India's development cooperation in strengthening relations with Africa will grow in significance.

Third, Africa remains vital for India's emergence as a global actor both beyond its own immediate neighborhood but also in the international institutional arena. While this is often seen in the narrowest terms as New Delhi's quest for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (and the 54 African votes to support its bid), it goes well beyond that. Both India and Africa are keen to shape the emerging global regimes particularly those related to food, energy, climate, water, cyber and space. However, there are two challenges: first, neither India nor African nations have the capacity to shape these regimes on their own. Second, on many issues, such as climate change, there are significant differences between India and Africa. Both will have to work to address these differences if they are keen to shape the emerging world order and related norms and institutions.

One such sphere is UN peacekeeping. India has had a long engagement with Africa in terms of peacekeeping, dating back to the UN Operation in Congo in 1960. Indian peacekeepers have been especially appreciated for their efforts in prevention of mass genocide in the South Sudan conflict most recently. Indian peacekeeping in Africa mainly stems from its support for African initiatives for peace and security with prominent Indian financial support for African regional bodies, such as the AU Missions in Somalia and Mali. To this end, India regards its peacekeeping efforts in Africa as providing justification for its UN Security Council ambitions. However, not all African nations, including some that hosted Indian peacekeepers, have a similar positive or even benign outlook. In some instance alleged sexual and financial misconduct by Indian peacekeepers have marred India's credentials. New Delhi's self image notwithstanding, India has not been very successful in converting its UN peacekeeping efforts into political support for a permanent seat on the Security Council including, not surprisingly, from many of the countries where it has participated in peacekeeping operations. Thus, it would be imper-

ative for India and Africa to have a sustained dialogue on peacekeeping to make it more effective and move beyond the "gold versus blood" debate that has stymied UN peacekeeping.

Finally, there are security threats emerging from Africa that not only impact the African nations but also have a strong bearing on India. Terrorism and organized crime (including piracy) are of increasing concern to India and Africa. International terrorism has been on the rise in Africa in recent years extending from Nigeria in West Africa to Somalia in the Horn of Africa. In the past few years, the Boko Haram group, which has pledged allegiance to the deadly Islamic State, has been on a rampage in northern Nigeria and is responsible for thousands of deaths in the country. Similarly, Mali has been plagued with Islamists and separatist groups such as Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM), Ansari Dine, Movement for Tawheed and Jihad in Africa (MUJAO) in the northern region. Militants have been a major threat to peace and security in Somalia and the neighboring countries for decades now. Reports also claim that terrorist groups with linkages in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq have been using Africa as recruiting grounds for jihad. While India is not directly affected by the localized terrorist organization in Africa, the troubling links between Somali and other groups such as the al Qaeda affiliated Al Shabab, and militant groups in the Af-Pak region could significantly affect India's future security.

Piracy is another major concern that has led to a significant presence of the Indian Navy on the East African coast, from the Gulf of Aden to the Mozambique Channel. India has historically had a considerable naval presence in Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania. Indian military institutions particularly the National Defense College also provide training to officers from countries such as Mozambique, Tanzania, Seychelles, Botswana and Lesotho. Eradicating piracy and ensuring safe and free Sea Lines of Commu-

nication in the Indian Ocean remains one of the major objectives of the Indian military engagement in Africa.

Given these threats perpetrated by non-state actors and the weak governance capabilities of the African states in dealing with these

threats, it is in India's interests to engage with African countries in addressing these threats effectively through greater defense and security cooperation. A sustained security and strategic dialogue – similar to the one that India has with other nations – would be a useful start.