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## India, Africa and the Indian Ocean

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A rising Africa has caught the attention of the world not merely because of its vast natural resources but also because it is the economically fastest growing continent. The article argues that, as Africa gains prominence, the roles of China and India have come into focus. New Delhi's current policy is quite different from that it pursued in the post-independence era, which was focussed on the limited political agenda of anti-colonialism. Even as its interests in the Indian Ocean rapidly grow, its great power ambitions are increasing backed by a burgeoning economy. This has necessitated a new a new policy of engagement that is expansive and multifaceted, encompassing political, economic and strategic dimensions. India maintains that its robust economic relationship is part of South–South cooperation and hence mutually beneficial, for it is aimed at capability and institution building. While economic and political aspects continue to dominate the academic discourse, the Indian Ocean is beginning to become a significant factor in India's Africa policy, even as this ocean acquires enormous geostrategic and economic importance.

**Keywords:** Africa's rise; India–Africa; Indian Navy; India's maritime strategy; Indian Ocean

### Introduction

What a difference a decade can make! In May 2000 *The Economist* headlined an issue 'Africa a Hopeless Continent', but a decade later in 2011, first *Time* and later the same year *The Economist* were singing paeans to Africa and how its rise was the next big thing in global affairs and it was poised to be the engine of growth – huge odds notwithstanding. Of course, there is no question that Africa, once derided as a drag on the rest of the world weighed down by all those problems associated with extreme backwardness and the political unrest and violence that were sweeping virtually the entire continent, has still to surmount several of these problems, but there is no denying that it is witnessing unprecedented shifts. Its share in global wealth is inching up steadily and by most estimates prospects for a continued robust growth in the coming years are bright (Devarajan and Fengler, 2013; World Bank, 2013, pp. 155–168). According to *The Economist*, 'Africa is the world's fastest-growing continent just now. Over the next decade its gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to rise by an average of 6% a year, not least owing to substantial foreign direct investments, which have gone up from US \$15 billion in 2002 to 37 billion in 2006 and 46 billion in 2012' (*The Economist*, 2013). Africa's share in global trade has also increased from 1.85 to 3.1% in one decade between 1996 and 2011, from US\$251 to 1151 billion (UNCTAD, 2013a, p. 8). Likewise, Africa

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is the only region that has bucked the trend by increasing its share of foreign direct investment in the midst of global economic slowdown: it has gone up from 3.2 to 5.6%. The US\$50 billion investments in 2012 were not limited to extractive industries alone; manufacturing and service industries are also becoming attractive destinations (UNCTAD, 2013b). As economists have been contending, the current boom is fuelled not merely by the demand for natural resources but because of steadily expanding manufacturing and service sectors and thus a progressively expanding market too. For instance, the region is the fastest growing mobile market in the world and there are already nearly 500 million connections in a population of about 850 million. Politically, the region is far more peaceful than probably it has been in the last several decades. Today more than half of the countries are democratic (compared with three in the early 1990s) and most others hold elections. The civil wars and political instability that plagued for decades have declined, although they have not completely stopped. Simultaneously, several social indicators show remarkable improvement. Consequently, there is no reason to doubt Africa's continued good economic performance for the foreseeable future. Perhaps more importantly, the new emergent political and business elites understand the changing global dynamics and the need to leverage Africa's advantages to reap the benefits of globalisation. According to World Bank Doing Business ratings 2012, a dozen African countries fare better than India on ease of doing business (International Finance Corporation and World Bank, 2012).

Whether the next century will be the African century or whether its moment has already arrived are debatable, but clearly it can no longer be ignored when seen against the backdrop of the kind of transformation that is taking place in a continent with a billion people and a huge natural resource base, and by most accounts the new frontier for hydrocarbons. Whichever way one looks, there is no question that Africa is poised take its rightful place in international affairs and its role is bound to increase in the coming years.

In the wake of Africa's emergence, one aspect that has caught the attention of the world is the new-found interest by the rising Asian powerhouses, especially China and India, and their fast-expanding footprint. These powers are moving from the margins to the centre stage, upstaging European powers that have held sway since the days of colonisation. They seem to be helping Africa to re-write its international relations. The tendency, however, to assess their roles in tandem is misleading, for their growing involvement in Africa is a complex phenomenon with each driven by its own set of interests and objectives. Of course, in a way they do compete for commodities and markets even as their economies expand, and both use clichéd Cold War jargon – 'South-South' cooperation and solidarity and brotherhood of 'developing countries' – but comparisons end there. In any case, both are old hands in Africa, although the roots of India's links are much older and more expansive than those of China (Broadman, 2007, 2008). An added incentive for India is the growing salience of the Indian Ocean both geostrategically and geoeconomically. That the Indian Ocean has come into the global limelight once again is in no doubt and it is difficult to imagine an Asian century without factoring in this ocean. Flanked by some of the most important regions and with one-third of the world's population, its littoral is economically one of the most vibrant regions. The energy-rich Persian Gulf, with its nearly two-thirds share of global oil and about 30% share of gas reserves, constitutes the lifeline to drive the economic dynamism in East Asia and Europe. On the other hand, it is also a major source of challenges that could gravely undermine global peace and security. It is home to countries that are politically volatile or bedevilled by internecine ethnic conflicts and also the principal breeding grounds of

global terrorism (including maritime terrorism), not to speak of rampant piracy. Safer shipping is emerging as a major security challenge, more so because the new maritime Silk Road stretches all the way from the Red Sea up to the Pacific via the Malacca Strait. Disconnected from the Indian Ocean for a long time and obscured by the rise of Western Pacific, it is becoming difficult to ignore Africa in the evolving Indo-Pacific strategic framework.

However, the paper's main focus is on examining India's engagement of Sub-Saharan Africa. It analyses the new policy framework that New Delhi has unveiled since the mid-2000s, its diverse contours, key drivers and the underlying strategy. The study concludes that India is seeking to engage Africa comprehensively, covering economic, political and strategic aspects and multilateral frameworks. Further, it contends that, if India seeks to establish a dominant role in the Indian Ocean, it needs to fashion a new Look West policy towards Africa.

### **Backdrop**

Although India's relations can be traced back to ancient times, the onset of British colonialism that brought large parts of Africa under its control played a major role in bringing India closer to Africa in recent times (Bose, 2006; Bowen, Mancke, & Reid, 2012; Dubey, 2010). Since commerce played an important part in the British colonialism, all possible measures were taken to establish its domination over the lucrative trade with India and beyond towards East Asia, the Persian Gulf and East Africa, all the way up to the Cape of Good Hope. It is interesting that, from India, the British controlled most of these countries from the Middle East all the way to South Africa, virtually covering the entire African East Coast facing the Indian Ocean (along with most Indian Ocean islands). The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 dramatically altered the way trade was carried out and it was simply too critical for Britain as it became the shortest route to the British Empire in the Indian Ocean region. Soon, not only did London extend its de facto control over Egypt, but it even bought the 44% shares that Cairo held in the Suez Canal by paying £4 million to a bankrupt Egypt which had invested nearly £44 million for the construction of the Canal. The Canal's significance further increased with the discovery of huge oil deposits in the Persian Gulf. Soon, Britain went on to acquire most of the territories (with the exception of Indonesia, that was returned to the Dutch after administering it briefly) with a view to establishing its suzerainty in the entire Indian Ocean rim region. Little wonder that the Indian Ocean was the British Lake until the Second World War.

Its geostrategic location dominating both sides of the Indian Ocean, its massive size and large population earned India adulation as the jewel in the British crown. Indeed, in many ways, what Britain did in the West Indian Ocean region was to establish their control over trade and commercial links that had long prospered between western India, the Persian Gulf and East Africa, and ensure that those channels of trade would remain uninterrupted. Secondly, it was much easier for Britain to mobilise large numbers of soldiers from India to fight its wars elsewhere. It is also important to note the pivotal role Indian soldiers and officers played during both the World Wars. In the First World War, some 880,000 India troops fought for the British, mostly in North and East Africa, and in all about 48,000 of them were killed (Murali, 2010, p. 35). From 220,000 at the beginning in 1941, the British had mobilised 2.5 million Indian men by the time the Second World War ended, thus becoming the largest volunteer army in history. More than

87,000 of these men lost their lives fighting on behalf of Britain on three continents in Africa, Asia and Europe. In fact, it was the British colonial connection that brought waves of indentured Indian labourers and later businessmen and others to Africa, who now constitute a major bridge connecting India with Africa.

Of course, M.K. Gandhi's long stay in South Africa between 1893 and 1914 and his brush with apartheid and his fight against it contributed a great deal to the awareness about Africa in India. By the time India had gained independence in 1947, India's relations, especially with East Africa had become more wide-ranging compared with the earlier limited and sporadic interactions. Thus, the imperial British connection is a key element in the story of India's involvement in the African continent.

The other aspect is the ideologically driven policy that India pursued with the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru as the chief architect after its independence. The national leadership expectedly adopted a foreign policy that was strongly underpinned by the ideology of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism. In the sequel to the March 1947 Asian Relations Conference held in New Delhi, India played a key role in expanding the Conference's scope by bringing in the African countries. Called the Afro-Asian Conference (popularly known as the Bandung Conference), it was convened in April 1955 with India as a co-sponsor. India was also at the forefront in raising the issue of colonialism in Africa in the international forums such as the UN. Yet, India was bypassed altogether in all of the African conferences held after the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Conference hosted by Cairo in 1957 (Gupta, 1992, pp. 133–149). By this time one could clearly signs of Nehru's waning enthusiasm, perhaps owing to a clash of egos with Sukarno of Indonesia on one side and Gamal Abdul Nasser of Egypt on the other. In addition to the turmoil both Egypt and Indonesia and the regions around them faced, soon India had to cope with unexpected tensions and a military aggression by China in 1962.

The China–India War came as a major disappointment for African countries as they feared that India would be forced to join hands with the West and that anti-colonial movements in Africa would suffer a serious setback as a result. Nehru was deeply disappointed that only Niger in Africa (and Malaysia in Asia) condemned the Chinese attack (while Sukarno backed China but Egypt preferred to remain non-committal). For many African countries who had either just been liberated or were still fighting colonialism, their cause was severely undermined because of the India–China War, irrespective of the merits of the case. For many it was not an easy choice to make between Beijing and New Delhi. There was no question that eventually balance tilted in favour of China for two reasons. One, for African radical leaders, China was more appealing because of its staunch political stance of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-neo-colonialism, and it was also successful in mustering support on a plank of Afro-Asian solidarity (Ogunsanwo, 1974, pp. 107–118). Two, India's credibility as a champion of the African cause vis-à-vis the Western countries was dented in the eyes of many African when most Western countries, especially the USA and Britain, came strongly in support of India during the war with China. The material and moral support that New Delhi received did not go down well with many African leaders.

It is not that India had to give up on Africa; efforts in earnest were soon undertaken to not only explain its version of events and the circumstances in which India had to fight the war with China. A series of high-level visits to Africa soon followed and a number of steps were undertaken to engage the continent afresh – the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC) programme in 1964 was one of them. It took almost a decade really to establish its credentials as truly pro-Third World and anti-Western when

New Delhi, despite American attempts at gunboat diplomacy, succeeded in the liberation of Bangladesh. Thus, in the 1970s India managed to retrieve considerable ground politically but was not in a position to make a substantial contribution to Africa's economic development. This was the beginning of a more pragmatic and less idealistic policy towards Africa, although New Delhi kept up the anti-apartheid stance.

In response to a demand at the Eighth Non-Aligned Movement Summit held in Harare in 1986 that pro-active measures were needed for the frontline states to extend moral and material support to fight apartheid, India proposed the establishment of the Action for Resisting Invasion, Colonialism and Apartheid (AFRICA) Fund. Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, was elected as the Chairman of the Fund and India contributed US\$40 million of the initial capital of US\$70 million (Rahamathulla, 1993, pp. 138–139). As Pham avers, 'India's political commitment to NAM and its at least rhetorical emphasis on South–South cooperation, especially coupled with its consistent diplomatic support for African nationalist movements, still left India well positioned to take up its engagements across the continent and forge new ties, as it has done in recent years' (Pham, 2007, p. 343).

The serious hardship that the Indian economy faced in the late 1980s and early 1990s together with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the consequent end to the Cold War had had profound effect on India's foreign policy. The market-oriented economic reforms that were introduced in the early 1990s perforce resulted in a fundamental re-crafting of foreign policy that was less rhetorical and more pragmatic. A major casualty of the paradigm shift was that the non-alignment ceased to be the cornerstone of foreign policy and, with that, what the Indian government used to time and time again harp on about – South–South cooperation – also came to an end. These were replaced by new a framework that underscored the urgent need to make up with the West, especially the USA. The economic exigencies forced India to engage the East Asian region in a big way in the form of the Look East policy. Much of the diplomatic effort was focussed on reinvigorating the Indian economy. In the new scheme of things, Africa was not considered a priority, which in fact led to downsizing of the overall diplomatic missions and personnel in the continent (Ramachandran, 2007). Thus, throughout the 1990s Africa was a back burner issue as India focussed on economic development.

### **Contours of renewed engagement**

Starting from the mid 2000s, however, one can see a dramatic shift in India's approach towards Africa. Two developments prompted this: first, by then China had stolen a march on India in terms of investments in extractive industries and trade; and second, after a relatively sluggish start (growth rate average around 6% between 1991 and 2000), the Indian economy began to show signs of rapid growth from the early 2000s (averaging around 7.5% between 2001 and 2011). One of the most pressing challenges in an atmosphere of rapidly expanding economy was to ensure energy security. Cognizant of the risks involved in depending solely on the Middle East, India began to look for alternative sources for stable supplies. By then Africa was emerging as the new frontier for oil and several other mineral resources. As India started formulating a new policy towards Africa, several other dimensions began to surface. Thus, although the initial focus appeared to be the quest for energy, indeed New Delhi had to fashion a multifaceted policy.

### **Political dimension**

In the rapidly changing political environment and in the wake of unprecedented globalisation, neglected for long as a hopeless continent, Africa is emerging as a major factor both economically and politically. Therefore, a number of political considerations also had their share in shaping India's policy. Perhaps the one that figured prominently in the new policy at the time was the ambition to become part of the UN Security Council as a permanent member. Riding high on a rapidly expanding economy coupled with a post-Cold War global political environment that was favourable, India sought to play a larger role at the international level. Besides unconditional support by the Permanent Five, it was equally important for India to muster the backing of a large number of countries to effect necessary changes in the UN Charter (Large, *n.d.*, p. 30). To be fair, India had also been a strong advocate of Africa getting appropriate representation in what it maintained was an urgent need to democratise global multilateral institutions, and a commensurate say in global affairs. While the G-4 (Group of Four – India, Japan, Germany and Brazil) began to prepare the ground in earnest, the African countries failed to evolve consensus on two possible slots for the continent. For various reasons, this issue is on the back burner for the time being but it is not the end of the matter.

India has always nursed ambitions to be a global player but has failed to realise them in part owing to serious domestic problems. To an extent it succeeded in providing an alternative paradigm in the aftermath of the Second World War at a time when most newly independent countries had little choice but to choose one of the super powers and subscribe to their ideological proclivities. This was in the form of 'positive neutrality' through non-alignment, Third World solidarity, South–South cooperation, etc. It even strongly advocated a New International Economic Order, Information Order, etc. For diverse reasons, that agenda had limited success but the role that New Delhi played was well appreciated in Africa. This is what India would like to replicate, not necessarily in the same way as in the past but as a provider of alternative models of development. Thus, the repeated use of 'South–South cooperation' by Indian top leaders may appear to be clichéd and outdated, but it is done with a strong conviction that, despite momentous changes, the role of the 'Global South' in world affairs is still marginal and hence it has a responsibility to speak for the developing nations. This is the reason why there is repeated emphasis that New Delhi's approach to Africa's economic development is quite different from that of others, especially China (Indian Prime Minister, 2011). Riding high on a booming economy coupled with formidable military might and a favourable political environment, India sees an opportunity to play a larger global role, including in Africa.

The one thing on which there is hardly any disagreement is India's role in peacekeeping operations under UN auspices. Ever since India participated by sending a large number of troops (nearly 12,000 out of 20,000) to one of the most complex operations undertaken by the UN in Congo between 1960 and 1964, it has contributed the largest number of troops for peacekeeping purposes and has participated in most of the UN missions – in Angola, Mozambique, Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia–Eritrea, and South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo more recently. It is noteworthy that India's peacekeeping efforts have increased a great deal since the mid-1990s. It is broadly recognised that India is one of the few countries that possesses the capacity to provide well-trained troops who are used to operating in diverse terrains. The Indian troops are particularly adept at operating in highly complex social environments because of equally complex conditions back home. Particularly in the last decade or so,



New Delhi has looked at its participation in African peacekeeping as a kind of soft power foreign policy tool to advance its diplomatic interests.

For a long time after independence India virtually shunned its diaspora, but in a fundamental policy volte-face, the 30+ million Indians settled overseas are now seen as a major asset in the economic development of the country, as cultural ambassadors and as India's political constituency in the host country. In 2012 India received US\$70 billion remittances from overseas Indians (Press Trust of India, 2013); many successful businesspersons are also investing in India and in several cases they are able to influence the political decision-making in their country of residence. Recognising their critical role, the government of India has taken a number of initiatives to engage them, creating an exclusive department called the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in September 2004, which undertakes myriad activities such as holding annual Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Overseas Indians Day) to strengthen ties with the diaspora. As part of this exercise, India hosted two Regional Diaspora Days, in South Africa in 2010 and Mauritius in 2012. The 3 million Indians mostly in East Africa and the Indian Ocean islands can play a vital role in promoting Indian interests and hence will receive a lot more attention in the coming years.

Not least is the political advantage that India enjoys engendered partly by its geostrategic location that enables it to forge close cooperation with great powers, in particular the USA and Japan. As the India–USA strategic partnership gains greater strategic traction, Washington has been exhorting India to increase its security role in the Indian Ocean. For the first time, the 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review averred: 'As its military capabilities grow, India will contribute to Asia as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean and beyond' (US Department of Defense, 2010, p. 60). Further, the strategy document, *Sustaining US Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense 2012*, made it clear that 'the United States is also investing in a long-term strategic partnership with India to support its ability to serve as a regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region' (US Department of Defense, 2012, p. 2). India and the USA have launched some joint programmes in Africa, such as the Open Government Platform, freely downloadable software to create a website to make governments more accessible and transparent, as well as programmes to eliminate preventable child deaths, strengthen agriculture management and extend food security among certain African partners, such as Kenya, Liberia and Malawi, and to build capacity for election management (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2013b). It is likely that Africa will figure prominently in India–USA strategic calculation in the coming years, especially in the security domain.

The first India–Japan Dialogue on Africa began in 2010 as a biannual event. Probably the initial objective was to evolve a common approach aimed at bringing about reforms to the UN Security Council. However, with renewed interest by Japan, now the agenda includes several other items, such as 'cooperation with the African Union and the Regional Economic Communities of Africa; economic cooperation with select African countries; and issues of mutual political interest including regional affairs in Africa' (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2011a).

### **Economic partnership**

Surprisingly, India has a long history of involvement in Africa. Despite highly restrictive economic environment before market reforms were introduced in the 1990s, the Indian



private sector had been involved in Africa. The Birla Group established a textile mill in Ethiopia in 1959 and an engineering unit in Nigeria in 1964, which were followed by several other companies in setting up shops in many counties. The Tata Group (a conglomerate of more than 100 companies) started Tata Zambia in 1977; it then began spreading operations to Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Namibia, Uganda, Mozambique, Malawi, Ghana and South Africa, investing in hotels, mining and transportation. From the government side, it instituted ITEC as a bilateral programme (although not targeted only at Africa) for training personnel in India, project aid, technical assistance, study trips and humanitarian assistance. The Special Commonwealth Assistance for Africa Programme, a sister programme to ITEC, is specially aimed at the 19 African countries of the Commonwealth.

India's economic interest in Africa has undergone a qualitative shift in the recent past and that is reflected in intensified direct investments, trade, aid and other programmes. Through close cooperation with the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the Export Import Bank of India (EXIM Bank), the government has been taking several initiatives through the India–Africa Conclave and other mechanisms to encourage both public and private sector companies to get involved in Africa.

The launch of the Focus Africa Programme in 2002 was the first tangible step under which the government provides financial assistance to trade promotion organisations, export promotion councils and Indian missions for market development assistance for building business links. As part of this, an annual India–Africa Project Partnership Conclave has been held since 2005. During the ninth edition in March 2013, reportedly 'more than 500 projects worth nearly \$70 billion were discussed during the three-day India-Africa Project Partnership Conclave ... Over 900 delegates from 45 countries participated in the Conclave organised by the CII in association with EXIM Bank of India. This was the largest ever participation' (IANS, 2013).

India's recent economic engagement has generated considerable debate and invariably it is compared with that of China (Taylor, 2012, pp. 793–794). Barring a few similarities, comparisons are misleading. For instance, India's political and security stakes are far greater than China's although less pronounced. As in the case of China, the Indian government has been at the forefront in promoting economic links. Nonetheless, one needs to discern certain fundamental differences in their strategies. By the time India began its forays into Africa in the mid-2000s, China was already a major economic player and thus had a head start. Indeed, to an extent China was responsible for goading the Indian government into action. Chinese economic involvement is far greater in terms of scale as well as importance than that of India. For instance, nearly 30% (slightly over 80 million tons) of China's oil was sourced from Africa compared with India's 22%, around 35 million tons. Owing to sanctions on Iran and mounting pressure by Washington, India is likely to scale up its oil imports from Africa. China does not reveal the extent of the aid it offers or investments it has made, but guesstimates suggest that aid could be as much as US\$75 billion and direct investments more than US\$40 billion by 2012 (Shin, 2012).

In 2011 India accounted for 5.2% of Africa's global trade compared with China's 16.9% (it was only 2.9% in 2000). Nonetheless, 52% of Indian EXIM Bank's global lines of credit have been offered to the African countries. This had added up to US\$4.1 billion by April 2012, with a further US\$618 million in the pipeline. In May 2011, India pledged a further credit line of US\$6 billion for Africa. Over 45% of the committed aid has been focused on infrastructure development (hydropower, rural electrification and railway

rehabilitation) and 22.4% on agriculture (Standard Chartered, 2012, p. 6). Indian investments – although estimates vary widely – are between US\$14 and 35 billion (WTO & Confederation of Indian Industries, 2013, p. 49). India too has made several high-profile investments, such as the private sector telecom giant Airtel's acquisition of Zain Telecom for US\$10.7 billion in 2010 with a subscription base of over 180 million spread over 15 countries. Many leading Indian companies in manufacturing and service sectors are looking for opportunities for investment in diverse areas such as agriculture, mining, automobiles and consumer products.

The spurt in interest by Asian giants has led to considerable debate and has given rise to suspicions as to whether these countries too are in the scramble for the continent's resources given the long experience of colonial and post-colonial exploitation. Nonetheless, as Fantu Cheru and Cyril Obi argue, from an African perspective, India and China are helping it not only to garner greater revenues and diversify its trade partnerships, but also to redraw the terms of economic interactions that the continent had been locked in with Western countries and financial institutions (Cheru & Obi, 2011a). They contend that it is still too early to arrive at definitive conclusion on the nature of impact that the rise of these two Asian powers will have (Mawdsley & McCann, 2011, pp. 12–13). Policy-makers repeatedly emphasise that Indian economic involvement is not 'neo-colonialist', nor is it simply to exploit Africa's natural resources, but it is an effort to build a mutually beneficial partnership. It has been pointed out that Indian projects are based on participatory models, making the local population stakeholders; the oft-used phrase is 'capacity building' (India has committed to build 100 capacity-building institutions spread across Africa). Africa's faith in India was apparent when it was made the first country to become a full member of the African Capacity Building Foundation in 2005. India's Pan-African e-network project is the biggest infrastructure project, connecting 53 countries of the African Union with top Indian universities and super-speciality hospitals for tele-education and tele-medicine in addition to 'e-governance, e-commerce, infotainment, resource mapping and meteorological and other services in the African countries, besides providing VVIP connectivity among the Heads of State of the African countries through a highly secure closed satellite network' (Indian External Affairs Minister's Remarks, 2010). Some 15,000 African students are likely to benefit from the Indian government's largesse. The variety of projects that India is sponsoring are astounding: from food processing to weather forecasting and from establishing a virtual university to providing scholarships for 22,000 students (Embassy of India, Addis Ababa). India also approved duty-free access to 94% of its total tariff lines, and preferential duty access to 92.5% of global exports to least developed countries in Africa. What differentiates India from China, as Taylor points out, is that, 'About 60 per cent of Indian aid is directed towards technical assistance. This reflects the central position of human resource development in India's development efforts in Africa' (Taylor, 2012, p. 788). Moreover, many look at India as a counterbalance to China and, because of its long association, its economic involvement is less controversial. It appears that India has preferred to keep a low profile compared with China even while gradually expanding its footprint across the continent (Naidu, 2011, pp. 48–68).

### **Multilateral engagement**

In addition to strengthening bilateral relations with select countries, India has also begun to make use of a number of multilateral frameworks to actively engage Africa. India is a

partner country of the African Union (AU) and has been scaling up its representation at the summit meetings. For instance, while New Delhi sent a junior minister earlier, in 2013 Vice President Hamid Ansari represented it. The most important multilateral mechanism so far is the India–Africa Forum Summit that India launched in 2008 as part of strengthening relations with the AU. In addition to the AU Commission, the Summit was envisaged to be a triennial event attended by leaders of 14 countries, resulting in two major announcements, the Delhi Declaration and the Africa–India Framework for Cooperation in 2008. However, it was during the second Summit that was held in May 2011 in Addis Ababa, represented by 15 countries and the AU (mostly by heads of states as per the Banjul Formula), that New Delhi announced a slew of measures to strengthen its bonds with Africa, including US\$6 billion of credit lines and grants. The outcome was the Addis Ababa Declaration, a comprehensive document dealing with numerous issues of common interest (Addis Ababa Declaration, 2011).

After a decade of lukewarm attitude since the founding of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR–ARC), India has warmed to the only regional multilateral framework and its potential to promote regional cooperation. A lack of interest was in part due to its own experience of lacklustre performance of regional multilateralism in South Asia and scepticism about its viability in general, but importantly both Australia and South Africa too lost interest, with each concentrating on their respective neighbourhoods. However, things have changed remarkably in recent years and the new name of the game is regionalism and regional multilateralism, which New Delhi now fully appreciates. As the East Asian experience demonstrates (especially the most recent Regional Comprehensive Economic Cooperation and the Trans-Pacific Partnership proposals), thanks to globalisation and the unbelievable strides in communication and transportation, distances and diversity are not impediments to regionalism whereas a lack of political will can be a key constraint. The New Regionalism now is as much economic as geostrategic. With WTO deadlocked, the attention is on regional arrangements with Free Trade Agreements/Regional Trade Agreements (FTAs/RTAs) becoming principal drivers of trade and economic cooperation. Moreover, India is no longer reticent to include security issues in the Association (Naidu, G.V.C., 2012). Indeed, for the first time a concrete security agenda has become part of the IOR–ARC’s agenda with India as the current Chair of the Association (IOR–ARC, 2012), perhaps prompted by growing concerns about the serious challenges posed by piracy in the western Indian Ocean and threats of maritime terrorism as evidenced by the deadly attacks on Mumbai, which took over 165 innocent lives (Lehr, 2013). In any case, given the nature of maritime security problems in the vast Indian Ocean region, it is apparent that India needs to make use of region-wide multilateral forums to develop strategies to counter them. As the largest and most important member, India is endeavouring to reinvigorate the IOR–ARC so that the organisation plays a meaningful role (Sakhujia, 2012). With key countries such as Australia, South Africa and Indonesia taking a keen interest, conditions could not be more propitious for the IOR–ARC to play a significant role. A major advantage will be making East African member states stakeholders in the ascent of the Indian Ocean.

India initiated the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) in 2008 (to be convened biennially and whose inaugural event India hosted in 2008) to bring the littoral navies together and to expand intra-regional interactions. Represented by 35 regional nations, it is by far the largest gathering of naval chiefs of member states, which also includes 12 East African nations. Its objective is to promote maritime cooperation among the members ‘by providing an open and inclusive forum for discussion of regionally relevant

maritime issues. In the process, it endeavours to generate a flow of information between naval professionals that would lead to common understanding and possibly cooperative solutions on the way ahead' (Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, 2008). The IONS platform offers a great opportunity especially for the Indian Navy to closely interact with counterparts.

Prompted by the lack of progress in the World Trade Organization, particularly during the Cancun Conference, the India–Brazil–South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum was launched through the 2003 Brasilia Declaration. Although only South Africa is part of this forum, its putative intent is to strengthen South–South Cooperation and thus the interests of African countries are expected to be advanced through this forum. In addition to promoting economic cooperation among the member countries and addressing developmental issues of the South, the tripartite forum also has a stated political objective of bringing about reforms to the UN Security Council. Through 14 working groups and six People-to-People Forums, IBSA proposes to work on certain concrete projects for the common benefit of three countries. These countries also hold biennial maritime exercises under IBSA auspices (Indian Ministry of External Affairs 2013c).

### **Indian Ocean and Africa**

The Indian Ocean dimension in India's Africa policy is relatively recently one and hence there have not been many detailed assessments save some passing references by analysts. In the following an attempt is made to understand the dynamics in the backdrop of the rise of the Indian Ocean and India's interests and ambitions. To be sure, as far as India is concerned, a definitive policy framework vis-à-vis in the West Indian Ocean is yet to take shape but certain pointers suggest that in the coming years Africa in general and the littoral countries on Africa's eastern seaboard in particular are likely to figure prominently in the evolving maritime strategy of India.

After having been overshadowed by the rise of the Atlantic and later the Pacific, the Indian Ocean is regaining its pride of place once again as the cynosure of the world's attention. It is becoming increasingly clear that major sources of threats to global security in the non-traditional domain, in particular terrorism, religious extremism and piracy, are emanating from this region (Rumley, 2013). At the same time, it is also a major repository of huge natural resources, especially energy, that are critical for the prosperity of the rest of the world. More than 80% of the East Asian hydrocarbon requirements, prominently of the global economic power houses China, Japan and India, are met with imports from the Middle East and Africa. Over 40% of global trade – with some 100,000 ships a year at present – transits the Indian Ocean and is critical to the global economy. It is not simply the resources and the vital sea lines of communication that make the Indian Ocean so critical to the rest of the world but equally its economic performance. The combined GDP of the rim countries rose to US\$6.5 trillion in 2011 from US\$5.7 trillion in 2010 (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2012). As noted, much of Africa, in particular the east and southern regions that flank the Indian Ocean, are already economically dynamic and closer links with Asian economic giants and their investments and development experiences will have enormous impact. Because of its geographical location, India's destiny is firmly tied to this ocean. Consequently, as the main resident power and possessing the largest navy among the littorals, India sees a historic opportunity to emerge as the preeminent power and be able to play a pivotal role in managing its security and in crafting a new security architecture.

It is useful to keep in mind two key developments among others which will have a bearing on the Indian Ocean, including Africa, in the coming years. First, the emergence of China and India as maritime powers will fundamentally affect the Indian Ocean security (Sakhuja, 2011). Thanks to their rise as major economic powerhouses and inexorable integration with the rest of the world, both have embarked on long-term plans to acquire considerable sea power, which could fundamentally reorder the regional security order. There are clear indications that, in the evolving logic of Indian Ocean security, China wants to be a key player because of its critical dependence on trade routes. For instance, Beijing now receives an estimated one-third of its oil imports from Africa and another 60% from the Middle East. China's stakes will dramatically rise in the coming years. Even a cursory look suggests that the supply routes that China uses to trade with Europe and the Indian Ocean region can be vulnerable. Given India's own emergence and ever increasing interests, it harbours the ambition of converting the Indian Ocean into its sphere of influence. Thus, competition (and even strategic rivalry) between the two is distinctly possible, if not in the near term, surely in the medium to long term.

Second, even as Africa starts finding its due place in global affairs, the contest for the continent is intensifying. As noted, China and India are becoming major players, and not to be left behind, Japan too has renewed its interest by announcing mega plans. Following the footsteps of these countries, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has declared plans to revive its African links in a big way after ceding space to China and India. Japan pledged a US\$32 billion aid package at the three-day Tokyo International Conference on African Development in May 2013, which includes US\$14 billion official development assistance and US\$6.5 billion support for infrastructure projects (Reuters, 2013). President Obama too unveiled a major new comprehensive initiative called the U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup> in June 2012 (White House, 2012) to address the security challenges as well as to engage economically more deeply. During his June 2013 visit, President Obama announced US\$7 billion aid for electricity in Africa. Earlier in 2007 the US created a new command called the Africa Command (AFRICOM, became operationally an independent command in October 2008), which 'represents America's recognition of the security and strategic importance of Africa, impacting not only Africans but the interests of the United States and the international community as a whole' (Pham, 2011, p. 3).

### **India's maritime strategy**

Since India yearns for pre-eminence in the Indian Ocean, it is striving to acquire adequate capabilities by building a blue-water capable navy, by formulating an expansive maritime strategy and by forging close security relationships with littoral countries. Despite delays and therefore escalating outlays, the Indian intent appears to be to build a truly ocean-going navy (Naidu, G.V.C., 2013). According to a former naval chief, by 2027 the Indian Navy will wear a brand new look with some 150 principal combatant ships and another 500-odd aircraft-capable fleet. The kind of capabilities that India has been acquiring and proposes to acquire are obviously aimed at making its navy able to emerge as an expeditionary force, a fact acknowledged by the XII Defence Plan by making clear that the objective is to 'build adequate standoff capability for sea lift and expeditionary operations to achieve desired power projection force levels, influence events ashore and undertake military operations other than war' (Pabby, 2012).

In tandem with fundamental changes in the Indian Navy's force structure, an entirely new maritime strategy has begun to take shape. Under the new strategy the navy would be able to undertake what is called 'out of area operations'. India sees a favourable environment in the Indian Ocean which will enable it to play a larger role. The Indian Navy has brought out several policy documents on maritime doctrine (Indian Maritime Doctrine 2004 and a revised one in 2009) and strategy (Indian Ministry of Defence, 2007), which offer insights into India's interests and concerns in the Indian Ocean. The Strategy paper clearly delineates the regions of primary and secondary interest in the Indian Ocean and beyond. The former include the 'Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal, which largely encompass our EEZ, island territories and their littoral reaches; the choke points leading to and from the Indian Ocean – principally the Strait of Malacca, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb and the *Cape of Good Hope; the Island countries* [emphasis added], and the Persian Gulf, which is the source of the majority of our oil supplies; and the principal international sea lines crossing the IOR'. The secondary areas are 'the Southern Indian Ocean Region; the Red Sea; the South China Sea, the East Pacific Region' (Indian Ministry of Defence, 2007). It clearly defines the East and South African regions falling into areas of primary interest and thus it is first time that Africa has become part of India's maritime security perimeter. The documents also clearly spell a range of activities that India seeks to undertake for ensuring peace and stability by countering non-traditional security threats and by deterring moves that undermine its interests.

### **India as security provider in the Indian Ocean**

A number of instances demonstrate that India is becoming increasingly proactive and willing to shoulder responsibilities as a security provider in the Indian Ocean region, which is relatively a new phenomenon. What had been episodic previously is now becoming a regular feature even as the expectations from the rest of world increase, a shift that is more discernible since the early 2000s (Naidu, G.V.C., 2013). Although the Indian Navy was involved in a few incidents, such as intervention in the Maldives to save the Abdul Gayoom regime from a coup and the rescue of Alondra Rainbow, a Japanese-owned tanker that pirates had hijacked in 1999, its ability to provide net security became well known in 2002. During the Operation Enduring Freedom, the USA sought the help of Indian naval ships to escort American supply ships in the Strait of Malacca to protect them from potential terrorist attacks, a sign of the confidence that Washington had in Indian military capabilities.

In July 2003, at the request of Mozambique, India deployed two naval ships to provide coastal security during the African Union Summit held in Maputo. The gesture was repeated twice during World Economic Forum's African Economic Summit and the Fourth EU-ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States) Summit in 2004. The Indian naval ships were the first to arrive with relief soon after the deadly December 2004 tsunami that battered the Aceh province in Indonesia along with Sri Lanka and Maldives, and also when cyclones wreaked huge devastation in Bangladesh in 2007 and Myanmar in 2008. Once again, India was the first country in October 2008 to undertake counter-piracy operations and patrol trading routes from the Gulf of Aden in the wake of a major spurt in Somali piracy. The Indian Navy's role has become so critical in counter-piracy operations in Northeast Africa that most countries – EU, China, Japan, South Korea, etc. – have joined India in launching joint operations against piracy. By October 2012,



India had escorted over 2100 merchant ships besides permanently basing one of its warships close to the Gulf of Aden. Thanks to intense Indian patrolling, piracy attacks have drastically decreased in the last few years. In one of those rare instances, India, China and Japan have established a mechanism to coordinate the activities of their navies in the region. In fact, again in a break from the past, India is far more willing to share the burden of the security of the Indian Ocean as the former naval chief unequivocally claimed: 'The Indian Navy is completely cognizant of its responsibilities as the nation's primary guarantor of security and safety not only at sea but also as the lead agency in facilitating coastal security' (Verma, 2012).

### **Defence and security cooperation**

India has discovered only recently the use of its military might as a tool to advance its strategic interests in what is becoming a major phenomenon called defence diplomacy wherein the navy is the trailblazer. The most robust naval interactions, however, are with a large number of Indian Ocean littorals. These can be broadly categorised into joint exercises of different types, a variety of defence and security dialogues and strategic partnership agreements, and the mammoth training programme it offers. Only in the last few years are the East and South African nations are being paid due attention. Whereas imparting training is the main focus for several African countries, security relationships with the Seychelles, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique and South Africa are becoming crucial.

Although India built the Seychelles Defence Academy in 1989 and placed military experts to train the armed forces, it was only after signing a defence cooperation agreement in 2003 and the donation of a large naval patrol ship in early 2005 that an 'extensive cooperation between India and Seychelles in the field of defence and security in view of threat posed by piracy' was set in motion (Indian Ministry of External Affairs, 2013a), which was followed by the gifting of two new Dornier-228 aircraft and two Chetak helicopters for maritime surveillance. In February 2012 New Delhi announced the setting up of a Coastal Surveillance Radar System with the Automatic Identification System, which will help in tracking unidentified vessels and fighting piracy (Bhatnagar, 2012).

Probably a prized asset is a monitoring station that India built in northern Madagascar in 2007 that, 'complete with radars and surveillance gear can intercept maritime communication and gather intelligence on ships operating in the region. It also provides for monitoring piracy and terrorist activities for anchoring and facilitates manoeuvres in the region. It is strategically located on the favoured route of movement of oil traffic through the Cape of Good Hope and the Mozambique Channel.' It is first of its kind for India. Indeed, as a naval official claimed, 'With berthing rights in Oman and monitoring stations in Madagascar, Mauritius, Kochi and Mumbai, the navy will effectively box in the region to protect sea lanes right from Mozambique and the Cape of Good Hope to the Gulf of Oman' (Pubby, 2007).

India–Mauritius security cooperation has also been steadily intensifying. There have also been unconfirmed reports that India is keen to develop an airstrip on the Agalega Island, located in the north between the main Mauritian island and Seychelles for use by reconnaissance aircraft. According to the External Affairs ministry website, 'At the request of the Government of Mauritius, Indian Naval Ships regularly undertake surveillance and joint patrolling of the vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Mauritius



with a view to provide deterrence to ongoing piracy and illegal fishing activities in the region'. India also delivered an advanced Light Helicopter in 2009 and a Coastal Radar Surveillance System in April 2011 as part of a grant. Further, 'a bilateral agreement for the supply of an Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) to the Government of Mauritius is currently being implemented with the OPV being designed and constructed by GRSE Ltd. at a cost of US\$ 58.5 million' (Indian High Commission in Mauritius, [n.d.](#)).

South Africa esd keen to enter the lucrative Indian defence market for the supply of certain equipment, and as part of a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 1998, India bought 90 Casspir mine-protected armoured personnel carriers from Reumech OMC. However, the 1999 deal with state-owned Denel to supply 1200 bunker-buster anti-material rifles to the Indian army was found to have been secured through dubious means, leading to a major uproar, which is still being investigated. That put paid to any South African ambitions of gaining a share in Indian arms procurements. The 2006 India–South Africa Strategic Partnership Declaration makes references to the formation of India–South Africa Defence Committee and defence cooperation (Indian High Commission in South Africa, [2006](#)), but there are no signs of notable progress. India now basically engages South Africa through India–Brazil–South Africa naval exercises off the Cape of Good Hope since 2008 (the third edition took place in 2012).

In East Africa the country that is forging close security links with India is Mozambique. As noted, it began when at Mozambique's request India deployed naval ships to provide coastal security during a series of major summits in Maputo between 2003 and 2004. Subsequently, the two signed a comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding in March 2006, resulting in several activities involving all three armed services for military technical cooperation, logistic support and training. The two have also been holding Joint Defence Working Group meetings since 2008. The scope of the Memorandum of Understanding also 'deals with joint activities include maritime patrolling of the Mozambican coast, mutual training in military institutes, supply of defence equipment/services and establishment of partnership and transfer of knowhow and technology for assembling and repair of vehicles, aircraft and ships as well as rehabilitation of military infrastructure' (Press Information Bureau of India, [2011](#)).

## **Conclusion**

Africa owes its ascent to an extent to China and India and their robust economic engagement in the past decade or so. Indeed, Africa has reasons to celebrate the rise of Asian economic powers, for the demand they fuelled for natural resources is having a salutary effect. For a long time, low commodity prices and lack of investment to exploit abundant resources had been some of the contributing factors leading Africa to be written off as a hopeless continent. Of course it is understandable that rapidly increasing Chinese and Indian involvement has raised concerns in some quarters but most now appreciate the role the foreign direct investment can play in economic development. Indeed, Africa's bargaining power has gone up thanks to its immense economic potential and growing role in global affairs and the intense jockeying among the great powers to enhance their political influence in Africa. Against this backdrop, it is true that the initial drivers behind India's renewed interest in the mid-2000s in Africa were its resources, in particular oil, for its burgeoning economy and the fears of being marginalised by China's forceful forays. India's new Africa policy is still a work in progress characterised by pragmatism but without losing sight of the political context. Thus, a multitude of factors – from

energy to economics and from China to the Indian Ocean – are influencing a multifaceted policy.

India is a latecomer compared with China; however, it does enjoy certain advantages such as its familiarity with East Africa because of age-old trade links, the British colonial connection and the presence of much of the Indian diaspora. Not insignificantly, India has over the years built pockets of constituencies owing to the ITEC programme and training of military officers. Second, to blunt the criticism of economic exploitation, cleverly India is laying a lot of emphasis on capacity development and institution building. In terms of political strategy, regional and sub-regional multilateral frameworks, mostly centred around the African Union, are emerging as key instruments for New Delhi to engage Africa.

Although the recent discourse on the India–Africa relationship is dominated by economic relations and to a lesser extent political aspects, the strategic dimension of the Indian Ocean is a distinctly new feature. This facet has hardly figured in India's policy until recently but is beginning to become a significant factor. So far many of the security-related interactions are currently limited to the southwest Indian Ocean African island states; however, the mainland East Africa countries are expected to be under greater focus as Indian interests mount in the Indian Ocean. Despite India's ambitious maritime strategy backed by rapidly expanding naval capabilities and its emergence as net security provider, India's ability to influence developments in the Indian Ocean region should not be overstated. As a consequence, India might find it convenient to join hands with friendly countries, especially the USA, in the management of Indian Ocean security. That understanding is already visible in the East Indian Ocean, which could extend to the rest of the ocean and Africa as well. It is useful to keep in view the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new geostrategic framework underscoring the growing interface between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The growing interest and increasing interaction, especially between three Asian economic powerhouses along with renewed interest by the USA will make Africa a key constituent in the Indo-Pacific, which means that the Indian Ocean's overall salience will increase further. Africa may not be top priority for Indian policy-makers at present but its rise and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a new geostrategic framework with East Africa as part of it is something India cannot afford to ignore for too long and hence New Delhi is likely to pay considerable attention to this continent in the coming years.

## Note

1. In this article Africa refers to the Sub-Saharan African region.

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