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India's military deployment in Africa seems confined to the African rim of the Indian Ocean, as relations with North African countries, particularly in the military field appear quite limited, with the exception of Egypt. With this country, New Delhi entertained good military relations through exchanging visits of high-level military delegations, signing MoU on defence cooperation in September 2022 and holding several joint military exercises. India and Algeria agreed on a broader endeavour to boost their relations including defence cooperation, after the visit of Indian Chief of Staff Gen. Anil Chauhan to Algiers in October 2024 and the signature of a bilateral defence agreement in November the same year. The visit of the Algerian Minister Delegate for Defence and Chief of Staff of the Army Lieutenant General Said Chengriha to New Delhi in February 2025 may be a signal of Algeria's desire to diversify its military cooperation.

Whether with Egypt or Algeria, India may have the opportunity to extend its presence in Africa and provide North African countries with military assistance. It can also launch with these countries a cooperation framework in the field of outer space exploration for peaceful purposes, as it happened with Tunisia following an agreement signed in September 2019.

There is a clear need for India to define and implement a strategy for African development and not concentrating mainly on providing infrastructures and boosting economic growth (Drishti 2023). Africa needs political support to become a world power house. For this purpose, India has the required potential to work for reforming the United Nations and calling for a multilateral world system more beneficial to 'the Global South.' In this vein, the Indian successful lobbying to make Africa a member of G20 in 2023 may stand as a good sign in this direction. Africa also needs Indian expertise in domains like agriculture, rural development, microfinance, start-ups, incubators and digital technologies. These African demands could be explained not only because India is one of the leading countries in technology innovations but also because Africa has a vibrant youth potential and a skilled working force capable of meeting the challenges related to political emancipation, economic growth and the development of new technologies.

No doubt, India's presence in Africa would offer Africa large avenues to play off foreign powers against each other as it attempted to do with both China and the United States. A more autonomous foreign policy exalted by India may also help enhance the bargaining power of this continent to lessen its dependence on Western actors and reduce foreign meddling in its internal affairs.

time in five years to normalize ties between the two countries and Wang Yi, Chinese Foreign Minister went to New Delhi in August 2025 to confirm this rapprochement.

With the United States, India also adopted a more lenient stance to maintain a balanced approach in its dealings with both China and the United States. In February 2026, New Delhi succeeded in settling its previous tariff disputes with Washington, reducing US tariffs on Indian goods and increasing Indian purchases of US energy to lessen dependency on Russian outlets. The successive visits of Paul Kapur, US Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, and Elbridge Corby, US Under-Secretary for Defense for Policy to New Delhi in March 2026 may highlight the reshuffle of US-Indian relationship, which constitutes, in the Indian perspective, not a complete alternative to New Delhi’s relations with Beijing, but a balanced strategy in India’s dealings with both its Asian neighbor and the United States. In return, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India’s Minister of External Affairs, participated in the Critical Minerals Ministerial Conference held by US State Secretary, Marco Rubio in Washington in early February 2026. In addition, a delegation led by Chief Negotiator Darpan Jain, was dispatched to Washington late that month to finalize the legal text of the bilateral ' Interim Trade Agreement.'

India’s economic ties with the US received a boost from a 'trilateral configuration' including New Delhi, Abu Dhabi and Tel-Aviv, the two subcontractors of American policy in the Middle East, to facilitate sound economic and security ties between this region and Southeast Asia. Indeed, the 'Zionist entity' has engaged with ASEAN countries on maritime issues, water management and high-technology devices, since it has increased its supplies of unmanned platforms and cyber security, two domains of great concern for India’s security. However, India adopted a neutral attitude towards the airstrikes carried out by the US and the 'Zionist entity' against Iran since February 2026 because Delhi seems eager to secure oil and gas supplies without being vindicated or targeted by Teheran. Trade relations with the US amounted to $ 212.3 billion in 2024 (United States Trade Representative, 2025), while trade exchanges with the Zionist entity reached $ 6.53 billion in FY2024-5 (Embassy of India 2025).

CONCLUSION:

Having no colonial past in the African continent and posing as a 'sister of Africa,' India was able to develop a serious partnership with African countries, particularly those having a littoral on the Indian Ocean. However, India does not nurture a grand strategic and economic design such as the Chinese 'One Belt One Road' strategy. It does not also have sound financial means as China or military capabilities, like Russia, two of its most serious rivals in Africa. New Delhi also lacks naval strength to compete with Beijing in the African continent, although it has shown, in recent years, increasing capacity in attempting to control the Indian Ocean, a vital strategic space for India’s security.

met in Manila in November 2017 on the margins of the East Asia Summit for 'Consultations on Connectivity Issues, Maritime security and Counter-terrorism' (Indian Ministry of External Affairs (2023). Through the 'Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness' (IPMDA) announced at the 2022 East Asia Summit convened in Tokyo, Quad enhanced its capabilities to combat illicit maritime activities and respond to climate-related and humanitarian events. Moreover, the 'Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission' launched in 2025, involved a collaborative exercise conducted by the coast guards of the Quad member states to improve interoperability and advance maritime safety in the Indian Ocean.

India's involvement in Quad has moved from a hesitant posture, because New Delhi did not consider itself a formal ally to Washington in the early times of the setting up of this forum, to "a more proactive stance, while maintaining its strategic autonomy" (Ng, 2025). Such a move responded to India's efforts to counterbalance China's influence in Asia and the Indian Ocean. However, by focusing on non-traditional security issues, such as infrastructure, digital connectivity, and capacity building, India" can engage with the Quad in a manner that does not provoke overt military conflict with China, but still safeguards its strategic interests" (Gupta, 2025).

India may be tempted to play a more balanced approach in its relations with China and the United States to maximize its economic interests and enhance its geopolitical designs. These changes occurred following the Ukraine-Russia war, the ignominious attacks of the 'Zionist entity' on Gaza, the Washington-Tel Aviv-led military aggression against Iran and the 'predatory' actions carried out by President Trump against Venezuela and his threats of taking over Greenland and even Cuba by force. In such a changing and troubled world context, India and China thought more opportune to maintain their strategic autonomy against pressures exerted by the Western world.

India has recently adopted a cautious policy towards China to avoid a confrontation that may have thorny incidences on the security of the two Asian powers. After years of frozen relations due to clashes that occurred in the Galwan Valley in 2020, India engaged with China on a border agreement in 2024, including the withdrawal of their troops from disputed patrol zones and resumed direct flight connections between the two countries that were suspended for more than five years. The two Asian powers declared their readiness to enhance cooperation in areas of shared interest like technological innovation and loosening some restrictions on Chinese investments. In this promising context, bilateral trade climbed to $127.71 billion in 2025, up from 118.40 billion the previous year (Chhaya, 2025).

The two Asian powers seem likely to working together within BRICS to promote a multipolar world (Lidarev, 2026), as their relationship expects to improve, with India needing the support of China to convene the BRICS Summit in 2026 and China eager to win India's back-up for hosting the summit of this organization in 2027. In July 2025, Indian External Affairs Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar visited Beijing for the first

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, voiced his worries against China's increase of naval capabilities and influence in Africa by stating, "Indian authorities are closely monitoring ports that China has built in Pakistan, Sri Lanka and other areas around the Indian Ocean region. From an Indian point of view, I would say it is very reasonable for us to prepare for a greater Chinese presence than we have seen before. Maritime concerns are not necessarily today between two countries. If you look at maritime threats, piracy, smuggling or terrorism, if there is no authority, no monitoring, no force out there to actually enforce the rule of the law, it's a problem" (Africa Defence Forum, 2023).

To counter Chinese naval presence in East African littoral and particularly in the Indian Ocean, in which India considers itself as the resident power, New Delhi had invested $250 million in developing an airfield, port, and communications hub in Djibouti. The objective consists of keeping an eye on this part of the Indian Ocean and alleviating worries inherent to the protection of 475 underwater cables carrying more than 90% of internet data around the world (Dobson, 2023).

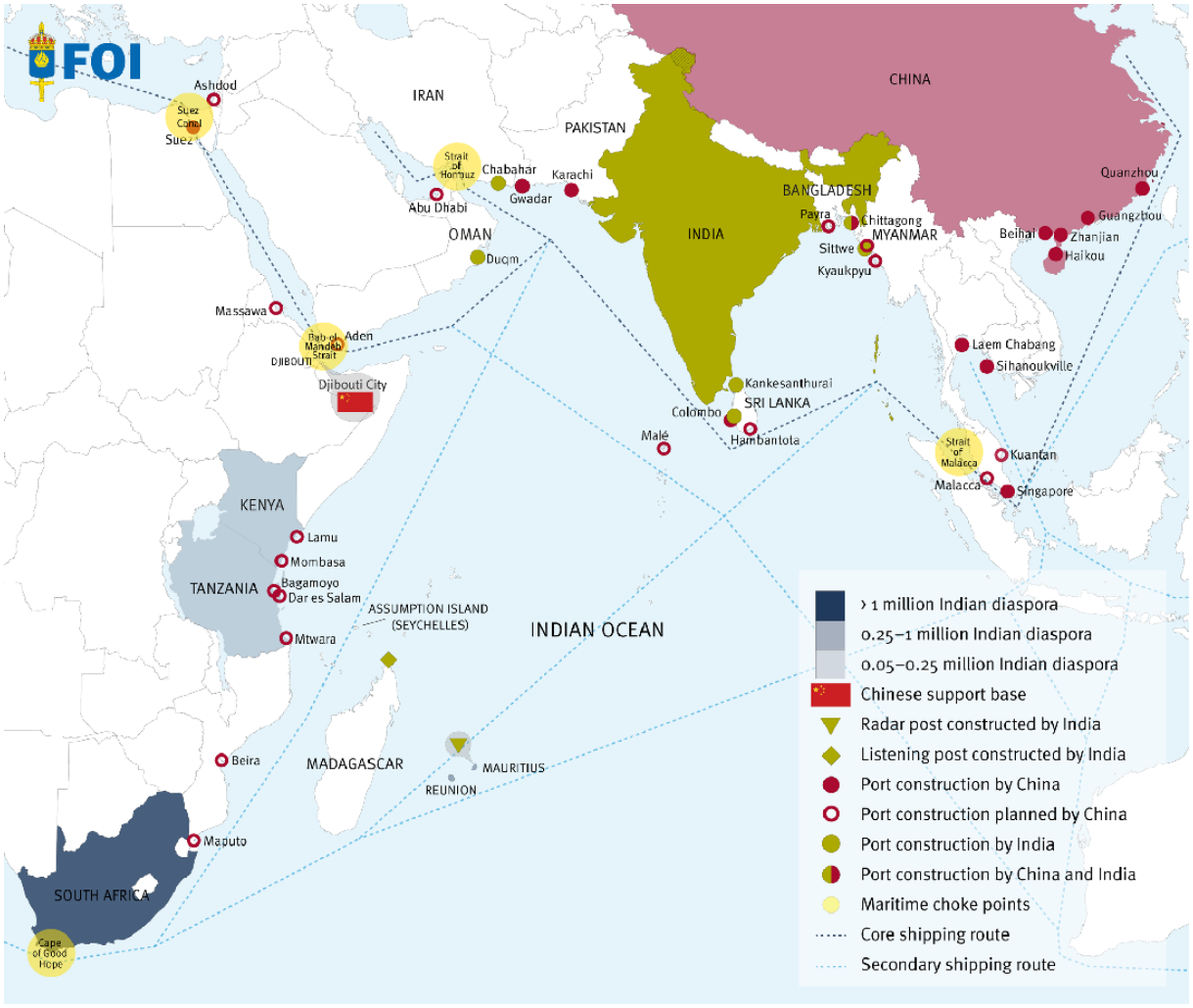
In addition to commissioning a base on Minicoy, the southernmost island in India's Lakshadweep archipelago, which lies off its southwest coast and closer to the Maldives, India has set up an airstrip and a jetty on the tiny Agalega Islands of the Indian Ocean strategic outpost of Mauritius in 2021. Reports speculated that through this move; India intended to militarize Agalega Island to reinforce its military arsenal in the Indian Ocean. Thus, New Delhi faced accusations of turning Agalega, a small village of coconuts and anglers for generations, into a military cradle (Pasricha, 2024). The objective consists of ensuring India's access to the entire Indian Ocean, taking advantage of the relative geographic remoteness of China from this region. However, both India and Mauritius denied these allegations. Mauritius Prime Minister retorted that the infrastructure installed on the Island would help modernize and strengthen security in the region (Interactive Al Jazeera, 2021).

The increasing involvement of India in the Western parts of the Indian Ocean aims at pre-empting Chinese encroachments in this region and ensuring a leading role in protecting sea-lanes of communication and countering threats, such as piracy, against merchant shipping, according to Sreeram Chaulia, an Indian scholar (Pasricha, 2024). This evolvement has exacerbated the long-lasting feuds between Beijing and New Delhi, from the rift over influence on Pakistan, the military standoff along their Himalayan border to the harsh competition over the control of the strategic waterways of the Indian Ocean, which channel energy supplies and commodities to the two Asian powers.

Because strategic concerns involve other Asian countries than China and other world major actors by geographic extension, India joined efforts to revive the 'Quadrilateral Dialogue and Security Forum' (Quad), a strategic partnership with Australia, India, Japan and the United States created during the tsunami that hit the Indian region in 2004. After 10 years of lethargy of Quad activities, the representatives of the member states of this forum

The following map summarizes India's deployment in the Indian Ocean and its flanks, through military posts, bases, port facilities and the spread of the Indian diaspora.

Map: **India's military presence and strategic interests in Africa**



Source: Swedish Defence Research Institute (2018). India, a Rising Power in West African Waters. FOI Memo 6810.pdf.

The map also shows the positioning of China in the region using the same means. Both Asian powers strive for the control of the maritime routes to protect their oil, commodities supplies and communication wires along the strategic junction extending to the West-African partners. New Delhi and Beijing have engaged into a fierce competition to court these countries to secure the access to their mineral riches needed for the economic growth of the two Asian powers. They are also trying to boost military cooperation including naval activities and co-ordination with West African countries to fight terrorism and piracy that are spreading along the African coast composed of fragile and unstable States.

Lately, India became more concerned with the geostrategic concerns related to the Indian Ocean and started to increase its naval capabilities because of the importance of this Ocean as a maritime hub and communications crossroads, in addition to increasing piracy and ecology disasters. Most crucial for India's security were the increasing presence of China's naval force in the Indian Ocean, its growing influence in Eastern and southern Africa through the installation of military bases, the consolidation of naval cooperation and the access to the sources of vital raw materials such as oil and rare minerals. Beijing has extended its outreach to African Ocean states such as Madagascar, Mauritius, the Comoros and Seychelles and established in Djibouti, the only military base set up by China overseas in 2017.

The naval doctrine updated in 2015 suggested a more proactive approach of "enhancing net security in India's areas of maritime interest." This strategy refers to "bolstering collective security by tackling shared challenges like combatting transnational piracy, or co-ordinating disaster relief efforts. India's naval strategies have evolved from prioritizing,' sea control' to emphasising 'sea denial,' suggested by its intention to acquire submarines (Dutta et al.2024).

Fierce Competition with China over Indian Ocean-West African Junction:

To narrow the bridge between its naval capabilities and those of China (132 warships against 370) and match Chinese rapid and substantial naval strength, India moved to purchase MQ-9B Sea Guardian drones from the US to sustain its ship-launched versions of the Brah Mohs supersonic cruise missile in 2023. In addition, New Delhi intended to raise the number of warships to 435 by 2030, build aircraft carriers as well as submarines to counter Chinese Type 096 nuclear-armed submarines, which are extremely hard to detect (Dutta et al. 2024).

In its efforts to secure the maritime routes for the safety of its energy supplies through the adjacent Ocean, India did not fail confronting the Chinese naval presence in this region. The Indian-Chinese rivalry over world power status and leadership over Asia extended to Africa, where the two Asian giants are fiercely competing to win influence and prestige. Chinese military presence in the Eastern shores of the Indian Ocean is quite massive, particularly in the context of the implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, through which the Chinese attempt to establish their geo-economic and geopolitical presence beyond the South China Sea. For Indians such an expansion may represent a serious danger to their country's economic power and international influence (Bhatt, 2024).

Beijing has built a naval base at Djibouti, a tiny country, squeezed between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea and adjacent to Bab Al Mandeb. Djibouti has turned into a hub of competition between foreign powers, including the US. France has built airstrips, ports, naval bases and logistic infrastructures in Angola, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania and Mozambique.

Indian Navy and Tanzania People's Defence Force co-hosted at Dar Salam with the participation of 10 African countries a first-of-its-kind naval exercise in the Indian Ocean, which consisted of a six-day drill in April 2025, known as 'Aikeyme' the Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement (ADF (2025). The objective aimed at enhancing maritime security through joint training and exercises focused on piracy and information sharing. In a speech delivered at the inaugural ceremony of this exercise, Tanzania's Defence Minister, Stergomena Lawrence Tax, stated the "significance of going along to tackle maritime threats like piracy and trafficking." She called for "collaborative effort towards Maritime security by like-minded partners" and highlighted the aim of building an "enduring framework of maritime security, including innovation and information sharing." (Pib. gov, 2025).

New Delhi also signed deals on shipbuilding and port development to strengthen the capabilities of some African countries in the domain of repairing equipment and dock facilities through the assistance of Indian experts (Usmani, Mishra, 2023). By joining the Djibouti Code/Jeddah Amendment (DCOC), as an observer member in August 2020, India has further strengthened its role in ensuring maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden. The DCOC, a grouping on maritime matters and comprising 18 states adjoining the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, the East coast of Africa and Island countries in the Indian Ocean region, aimed at fighting piracy and armed robbery against ships in the Western Indian Ocean Region, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

To engage in a structured security framework with its African partners, India hosted the first India Africa Defence Ministers Conclave at Lucknow in 2020 and 'India Africa Defence Dialogue' (IADD) during the Defence Expo 2022 held at Gandhinagar, with the participation of more than 50 countries. This conclave aimed at boosting defence cooperation between the Asian power and its African partners.

The Asian power continued its efforts to strengthen this common security framework, by incepting the first 'India-Africa Army Chiefs' Conclave in 2023, under the theme 'Africa-India Militaries for Regional Unity-AMRUT' to enhance synergies between the armed forces of India and Africa. India also increased the number of its military attachés across Africa to revitalize bilateral defence cooperation by investing in sensitive security such as cybernetics, Artificial Intelligence, maritime surveillance, unmanned vehicles, space, and undersea scanning technologies.

For many years, India's conflicts with its Pakistani neighbour and competition with China took the feature of land disputes involving the reliance on army and air forces and capabilities only without attempting to use naval empowerment to enhance their defence immunity, although the vast seas and straights border the two countries, providing them long traditions of maritime nations.

Besides its efforts to implement a strategy to protect its Ocean overtures, maritime roads and naval facilities, the Asian power tried to establish bridges with African Countries through a complementarity between Indian Navy’s 2015 Maritime Strategy document and the African Union’s 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy. These two designs found complementarity in initiatives, such as the Security and Growth for All in the Region (SUGAR), port development (SAGARMALA), and the Asian African Growth Corridor (AAGC) with Africa as equal partner in the Indian Ocean game-changer. These strategic designs received a boost by increasing naval cooperation through regular port visits, logistic support, naval intelligence, patrolling of Exclusive Economic Zones and the monitoring of shipping traffic in the Indian Ocean and share submarine safety information through the creation of a Fusion Centre based in Gurugram in India’s National Capital Region (Abhishek, 2019).

The South Western Indian Ocean is a primary area of interest for India India's two aircraft carriers and other warships regularly cruise in the Western Indian Ocean (Gieg, 2023).

Common security challenges, like the rise of terrorism and maritime insecurity are also significant imperatives for India’s defence engagement with the region. India’s naval engagement appears important, though focusing mainly on this continent’s Eastern coast, which lies on India’s strategic maritime confinement. Its objectives consist of securing the Sea-lanes of communication through tacking ship movements and securing the Indian Ocean coastlines. India has set up Radar surveillance facilities in Seychelles and Mauritius, along with a listening post in Northern Madagascar.

Securing the Mozambique Channel proved vital not only for India but also for other major powers because of the 30% of the global tanker traffic as well as sizeable offshore gas reserves in Mozambique. Therefore, India, Japan, China, the US, EU states and the UK all have "a substantial interest in securing the offshore area to extract natural gas that will become an increasingly crucial component of their future energy-generation policies"(Jenberg et al. 2021). India seems worried about securing a safe maritime route from the Mozambique Straits through facilities on Islands situated in the African Western shores of the Indian Ocean because it constitutes the third largest consumer of gas in the world.

India has started by increasing visits to the ports of many African countries, incepted bilateral and multilateral naval exercises with its African partners, such as the first India-Mozambique Tanzania Trilateral Exercise (IMT- TRILAT) in October 2022 on shared threats and improving interoperability between the naval forces of the three countries. New Delhi has organized 47 editions of India’s Maritime Partnership Exercise (MPX) in the Western Indian Ocean in which African navies have participated.

Force and their lack of equipment with some of the advanced weapons, such as the beyond-visual-range-air-to-air-missile and the active electronically scanned array radar (Akene, 2024).

Despite the complexities related to international arms trade involving extensive negotiations, regulatory approvals, customisation of equipment and reliable after-sales facilities, India aims "to more than double its annual arms exports to $ 5billion in the coming years from $1.7 billion currently"(Akene, 2024). Encouraging signs for increasing India-African arms trade consisted of the $1 billion-worth arms deal New Delhi struck with Nigeria in 2024 and the rise of India to the third highest ranking in the arms trade with Africa, with 15%. Thus, India stood slightly behind China (19%) and Russia (17%), but quite far ahead of France, which recorded a share of 11% of the global arms sales to Africa (Sing, 2024).

India's vested geostrategic interests in the Indian Ocean:

Among foreign powers present in Africa, India is the nearest neighbour of a great number of African countries. It shares with them a vast ocean named after the Asian power, for not only its central position with the longest coastline, its immensity as a continent, but also for its prominent influence in the region. The Indian Ocean is the third largest ocean in the world. It includes vast maritime swathes overlapping the Strait of Malacca in the east, the Mozambique Channel in the west and stretching over many strategic seas (Arabian and Red Sea), Gulfs (Persian and Aden), the Bay of Bengal and encompassing 33 countries (13 in Africa) with a population of nearly 3 billion.

The Indian Ocean has constituted an important hub of cultural and commercial exchanges since ancient times and a vital network of early human migrations and civilizational melting pots. Nowadays, it represents a crucial maritime route as 2/3 of all oil tankers, 1/3 of all big cargo ships and half of all container ships in the globe sail across the Indian Ocean each year. It channels, annually, 70% of the world's container traffic, 46.5% of all crude oil shipped by sea (Chuong et al. 2022) and encompasses sea lines of communication which connect the Middle East, Southeast Asia, East Asia, Europe and the Americas and are crucial for global economic security. It conveys 80% of India's external trade and 90% of its energy supplies (Drishty, 2024) and constitutes for this country a buffer zone against potential security threats.

Moving from traditional continental perceptions dubbing Pakistan and China as rival powers, the Indian leaders started to perceive the Indian Ocean as a high priority on their security agenda because of the geostrategic assets of this region and the need to compensate for declining US presence and confront a growing Chinese footprint in the region (Passi et al. 2017).

disaster (Kulshrestha, 2014) in African countries, which have an Indian Ocean littoral, and provided India with a great credibility in the region and attested for the high degree of the readiness, operability and efficiency of its navy. In addition, in 2024 India provided food aid to Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe, affected by a severe drought and sent 150 tonnes of medical aid to 32 African countries during the Covid-19 pandemic under its 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative (Kakar, 2025).

Indian military involvement in Africa extended to selling arms like other major powers. It has developed and manufactured a vast array of weapons and defence systems, ranging from small to sophisticated aircrafts, which proved attractive to African countries because of their cheaper prices and the availability of maintenance (Ekene, 2024). At a gathering attended by army chiefs and officials from 31 African countries in New Delhi in April 2023, Indian retired army General VG Patankar declared, "We are making equipment which is affordable and reliable"(Military Africa, 2023).

An Indian defence and strategic affairs analyst, Retired General Major Harsha Kakar argued that India's defence exports, with a quality more reliable than China and lower in cost than in the West, were provided to African countries through soft credit lines. For example, India offered 155mm ammunition at $300-400 compared to the West's $3.000 each and 155 mm towed and self-propelled systems howitzers at half the price of western pieces (The Excelsior, 2025).

India's focus on defence exports generated substantial benefits as its arms sales reached in 2023-4 a record $2.63 billion, 32% higher than the previous year (Sing, 2024).India provided arms to some African countries, mainly those implicated in fighting piracy and terrorism, as it was the case of the Horn of Africa. New Delhi supplied armoured and interceptor boats to Mozambique (Bernacchi, 2024) and furnished patrol crafts (SDB Mk-2 type) to Mauritius and Guinea-Bissau (Arbab 2006). The Asian power supplied light helicopters SA-316 B Alouette-3 and SA-315B Lama to Namibia (Sputnik News, 2017). Moreover, it provided Mauritius, Seychelles and Mozambique with patrol vessels and interceptor boats (Beri, 2023).

In 2024, Nigeria signed a $1 billion deal with India to boost its defence industry and meet 40% of its local needs of manufacturing and production of military equipment consisting of firearms, ammunition, armoured vehicles and advanced communication systems by 2027 (Akene, 2024). Egypt has shown interest to acquire from India the *Akash* missile system a medium- range mobile surface-to-air missile (SAM) and Botswana intended to buy at least a squadron of India's *Tejas* fighter planes, after Nigeria's intention to acquire similar aircrafts from India.

However, Egypt's *Akash* missile system deals and the offer made by Nigeria and Botswana were not completed. Military Analysts have imputed the reasons why these deals fell through to India's complex bureaucratic process in developing fielding and supplying weapons, to the uncompleted operationalization of the *Tejas* fighter planes by the Indian Air

India moved to supervise the operations incepted by the United Nations and dispensing humanitarian assistance, which consisted of a part of the relief that went to the suffering civilian victims of African wars and violent conflicts. In addition, India provided training to African armies on UN peacekeeping missions, by setting up the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping (Cunpunk) in New Delhi, and launching the first Africa-India Field Training Exercise (Afindex-19) in 2019, to enhance coordination in UN Peacekeeping operations and humanitarian mine clearance activities (Beri, 2024).

The inaugural Africa-India Field Training Exercise-2019, which took place in a military station near Pune, consisted of a 10-day exercise with the participation of contingents with ten personnel from 17 African countries. The objective aimed at planning and conducting Humanitarian Mine Assistance and UN mandated tasks, such as team building, tactical level operations, establishment of a new mission, nuances of standing combat deployment, convoy protection and patrolling aspects (Abhishek, 2019). Another exercise took place in Pune in March 2023 with the participation of 25 African nations. On the sidelines of this exercise, India hosted the first Indian-African Army Chiefs' Conclave to demonstrate its engagement in military cooperation with the African continent. New Delhi also hosted the India-Africa Defence Dialogue at the level of Defence Ministers on the margin of the 2022 Defence Exposition convened in Gandhinagar in October 2022.

India was heavily committed to training African armies as its military engagement has focused on training human resource development, through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme set up in 1964. Training sessions covered various fields such as security, defence management, marine, aeronautical engineering, and concerned primarily educational schemes related to fighting cybercrimes and terrorism security, two major security threats, risking to undermine the foundations of many African States. During the period 1991-2001, the Indian army trained around 800 officers and JCOs from 12 African countries under the (ITEC) programme (Usmani 2023). A great number of African officers received training in Indian military institutions such as the Defence Services Staff College, Army War College and National Defence College, while New Delhi has deployed military training teams in African countries like Namibia, Tanzania, Lesotho, Botswana and Uganda (Beri 2024). It has also set up military academies in Harar (Ethiopia), Defence Academy, Command and Staff College (Nigeria), and Command and Staff College (Tanzania).

India proved efficient in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief with military contingents, equipment and devices during emergency cases, as happened during the Cyclones that hit Mozambique in March 2019 or Madagascar in 2020. During the devastating cyclone that hit the port of Beria in Mozambique in March 2019, three Indian Navy vessels operating in the region immediately diverted to provide assistance, which consisted of rescuing many stranded people, providing food and setting medical camps to treat the injured. This rescue mission (HADR) was the first to respond to the cyclone

However, behind this competition over the control of the Indian Ocean, lies the rivalry for leadership over Asia with its American-Pacific Ocean encroachment, because these regions may constitute the place where the fate of the world may be determined. They encompass not only the biggest economic powers in the globe (USA, China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India), but also the largest nuclear sanctuaries (USA, Russia, China, India, Pakistan and North Korea). As a confirmation of these new geostrategic orientations, Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh said, "the strategic importance previously dominated by the Atlantic Ocean is shifting to the Indian Ocean"(Al-Jazeera, 2025).
The paper covers three parts:

-One relates to scrutinizing India's involvement in the traditional spheres of defence and military cooperation,

-The second pertains to India's recent efforts to imposing naval presence in the Indian Ocean a deep military involvement in Africa, not only for geostrategic reasons but also for world empowerment and,

-The third delves into India's attempts to counter the rising presence of China in the Indian Ocean and its well-rooted influence in Africa.

Assessing India's African Engagement in Traditional Areas of Defence:

The nature of the relations between India and Africa on conventional military fields are multiform and fast growing. India is increasing the number of its military attachés in Africa and enhancing military cooperation. Officers from multiple African nations attended training courses in India. New Delhi had gifted military equipment to a few African nations over the years. Several coastal nations in Africa, including Kenya, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Somalia, and Tanzania are members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association. The organization aims to promote trade, investment, and economic collaboration among its members.

India's contribution in attenuating security challenges in Africa proved regular and substantial. It was the major element of the Troop Contributing Country for UN Peacekeeping Missions in Africa and a regular troop contributor to these operations since its participation in filling the troops of the first United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo in 1960. It may be worth mentioning as a prelude to recent Indian-Chinese competition over Africa, that Beijing started to participate in peacekeeping missions in Africa in 2012, only. At present, New Delhi has deployed around 4.362 troops for peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, Abyei, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Western Sahara and Somalia (Beri, 2024). Nearly 5,000 Indian personnel are currently serving in UN Peacekeeping Missions in Africa.

The Indian Ocean constitutes the space for rivalries between the world's major powers to control its maritime routes and trade flows, but the extent of their military engagement in the region proved different and fluctuant. Despite a base in Djibouti and forces posted in Somalia, the US military engagement in the Indian Ocean or the Straits of Aden has not been significant, as it did not effectively involve in fighting piracy or weakening the *Shabab* movement. Moreover, Washington has an array of open maritime roads, military bases, drones installations and deployed forces in many parts of the world and its interests in the Indian Ocean are not that vital for US security, preferring to keep an eye on this region rather than playing the role of the Sheriff. France maintains a presence through its base in Djibouti, but it has no operational autonomy and faces costly expenses to entertain this base amounting to 300, 000 Euros a month according to two eminent French experts on African politics, Pierre Juillet and Philippe Bohn (2025).

For the case of Russia, there was a sudden and surprising surge in military exercises conducted with Myanmar at the Andaman Sea at the end of 2023 (the first naval venture between the two countries in modern history) and the visit of Russian vessels to Bangladesh Chittagong Port in the Bay of Bengal (the first in 50 years). However, Moscow has been conducting with India bilateral biennial naval exercises since 2008 and has remained "sensitive to New Delhi's apprehensions toward the presence of China in the Indian Ocean and considers both China and India its friends and therefore, would not like to destabilize its ties with either of them by picking one over the other" (Bhatt, 2023).

The Gulf States, the Zionist entity and Ukraine, which has recently moved to offset Russian interests abroad and in Sudan in particular where the military presence of Moscow is well rooted, are competing to expand their influence in eastern Africa, but they still lack naval capacities to venture militarily in the Indian Ocean.

Geostrategic and security concerns explain India's efforts to upgrade from an economic partnership with Africa to the status of a major naval power in the Indian Ocean and one of the most influential actors in African politics. In this military deployment, naval empowerment seems crucial for India to counter the growing presence of China in this region, regarded as the most crucial threat for Indian security. In 2015, the Indian navy released a 'White Paper' articulating the importance of the Indian Ocean for Indian security through establishing substantial control and influence in this area in the face of a perceived increase in Chinese activity (Kolley 2024). According to an Indian Senior Fellow at the British International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), the concern of Indian leaders focus on "China's assertive policy towards their country, as well as its growing influence in the Indian Ocean, which they view as an attempt to gain permanent access to these waters and to 'encircle' India strategically"(Roy-Chaudhury 2017). Therefore, New Delhi can ill-afford to ignore China's continuing quest to go global in the maritime domain.

Therefore, India’s engagement in Africa did not concern only economic interests, but extended to the security sector, in which the Asian power has accused a deficit compared to China and other Western rivals. Since the early 2020s, India has moved from a cooperation based on training African troops and participating in peacekeeping missions to building naval bases and selling arms and military hardware. Such a shift seems to contrast with the image of India as a pacifist, sober and economically minded country.

This upgrading from traditional military objectives to deep military engagement based on naval deployment constitutes, precisely, the theme of this paper, as it tries to describe the nature of India’s initial approach to Africa in the security domain. This geostrategic prism constitutes the theoretical lay out to explain India’s involvement in the eastern parts of Africa and confirms the hypothesis related to growing leadership rivalry over regions. This assumption pertains to the rising competition between India and China in the Indian Ocean and vicinity of eastern Africa.

Competition with China constitutes the driving impetus of New Delhi naval deployment in the Indian Ocean, according to the perceptions of Indian leaders and represents the crux of the analytical layout of this paper.

As the potency of the 'hegemonic stability theory' became impaired because the US is no longer the sole hegemon in the world affairs, the conceptualisation moved to another paradigm pertaining to 'hegemonic confrontation theory' inspired by the Realist approach to International Relations focusing on geopolitics defined by great power politics. The current world balanced dynamics involve" China, the United States, the European Union, Russia, and increasingly India, playing the role of the great powers, and sharing the world stage with regional powers, such as Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, among others" (Sachs, 2023).

The balance of power paradigm, which constitutes the core of the realist school of international relations, emphasises the State’s search for protecting itself against another State by trying to match its power against the power of a rival state, whether by increasing its military might and economic capabilities or engaging in the policy of forming coalitions with other States.

India’s naval empowerment in the Indian Ocean and its search for influence in the eastern parts of Africa find a good explanation in the analytical framework, which combines realism and geopolitics. Realism pertains, here, to ensuring national power and security in a competitive environment and geopolitics focus on the impact geography and strategic location may exert on the orientation of the State’s foreign policy. In this vein, the case of India finds adequate justification in the theoretical postulate put forward by Alfred Mahan, a US naval officer and historian, who pertinently called for the need for a state with a littoral to use a strong naval fleet to protect its coastal swathes from eventual invasions and ensure the security of maritime routes (Mahan 1894).

on this common heritage, which inspires us even today to forge our partnerships not only in the bilateral sphere but also in regional and multilateral domains"(Ministry of External Affairs 2020).

India's contacts with Africa proved ancient, because of the geographic proximity with the African Eastern coast and the commercial relations that had permitted also the implantation of Indians through the slavery trade, which extended to South Africa, Tanzania and Kenya and encompassed large communities of Indian origin. By the time, this community, which counts about 3-4 million, currently serves as a strong lobby for Indian interests in Southern and Eastern parts of Africa.

After obtaining independence in 1947, India participated effectively in the decolonization of the African continent, under the impulse of the non-alignment policy preached by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and later, by his daughter Indira Gandhi who ruled India from 1966 to 1977 and from 1980 until her assassination in 1984.

Since the 1990s, India has focused on fostering its economic relations with Africa because of the need for energy and mineral products to sustain the slow, but increasing economic growth. Currently, India imports 80 % of its crude oil requirements, and Africa accounts for around 15% of its oil supplies, coming mainly from Nigeria, Angola, Algeria, Egypt and Equatorial Guinea (Beri, 2024).

In his address on Africa Day Celebrations held in June 2024, India's Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar declared that the Indian government has completed 206 projects in 43 African countries in various sectors such as waterworks, power plants, cement, textile factories and railway infrastructures and is currently implementing 65 projects worth over US$ 12.37 billion (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024).

India's trade with Africa has grown from 18% annually since 2003 to reach $103 billion in 2023, while New Delhi invested $70 billion in Africa, and accorded substantial loans, making it the second largest lender in this continent (ADF, 2024).This volume remains far behind the global trade recorded by China with Africa ($296 billion). Moreover, trade exchanges between India and Africa remained quite modest on the global scale in recent years, because they account for only 2.8% and 3% for India and Africa respectively, while Indian products represent only 6.3% of Africa's total imports, compared to China's 18.3% (Gopaldas, 2024).

Over the past decade, India's engagement in Africa has been guided primarily by Vision SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), which was recently expanded to Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement of Security and Growth across Regions) for the Global South. This strategy highlights the intimate link between security and development, as both India and Africa are well aware that poverty, illiteracy and bad governance are the ferment of terrorism, transnational crime and global instability.

1. INTRODUCTION:

From the outset, there may be a need to recall that academic writings have paid great attention to the presence of Western powers in Africa, neglecting the cases of other great powers such as India or Japan (Iratni, 2024). When dealing with India, these studies focused rather on the economic partnership, this Asian power has attempted to develop with Africa. Some studies pertaining to India's military interests in Africa and geostrategic have shed powerful lights on India's objectives in the region (Passi et al. 201, Abhishek 2019, Beri 2023, Chakrabarty 2024), but they were, whether quite outdated, or had insufficiently scrutinized the triptych: India's security concerns in the Indian Ocean-African geostrategic assets-China's potential rivalry. This treble-sided paradigm constitutes precisely the topic, which this study attempts to scrutinize with accuracy.

Indian rhetoric dubbed the partnership between New Delhi and the African continent as long standing, deep-seated, historic and expressing "shared interests, common aspirations, and solidarity"(Chakrabarty, 2024). From these perceptions, it appears that the relations between India and Africa have been not only ancient, but also mutually beneficial. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, termed Africa as India's "sister continent," in recognition of the long ties of affinity and solidarity. Decades later, Indian Premier Narendra Modi declared, ″Africa will be at the top of our priorities. We will continue to intensify and deepen our engagement with Africa. Our development partnership will be guided by your [African] priorities″ (Nantulya, 2023).

The historic background of Indian-African relations sprung from centuries of trade exchanges and migration flows, especially the ancient contacts established between India and the eastern coast of Africa. The roots of these relations became even deeper in the light of common anti-colonial struggle. Behind these links of solidarity stands the virtue of India as a world major power with no colonial past in Africa. In contrast, it was one of the countries to suffer from colonialism and exploitation. It was also a fervent advocate of the struggle of oppressed people to recover freedom and human dignity as highlighted by the non-violent resistance led by Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa in the early 1930s. Prime Minister Modi captured this historic sequence and past communion between Indians and Africans by asserting that: "we use the term 'Global South,' it is not just a diplomatic term…In our shared history, we have together opposed colonialism and apartheid. It was on the soil of Africa that Mahatma Gandhi used powerful methods of non-violence and peaceful resistance. It is on this strong foundation of history that we are shaping our modern relations"(Nantulya, 2023).

The Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Shri V. Muraleedharan, declared:" to borrow the words of South African leader and an Icon Nelson Mandela, India and Africa have been bound by a golden thread for many, many decades, a thread woven during the long, arduous and bitter years of struggle against common enemies: racism, imperialism and colonialism. Our strong relations after becoming independent nations have drawn so much

India's Military and Naval Incursions in Africa: A New Facet in the Continent's Geostrategic landscape

Prof. Dr. Belkacem Iratni
Free Lance-Algeria, Kiratni@gmail.com

ملخص:

سعت الهند، مثل القوى العظمى الأخرى، إلى تعزيز شراكتها مع أفريقيا كما حاولت إبراز نموذج مميز يهدف الى تثمين العلاقات التاريخية المبنية على التضامن والنضال المشترك ضد الاستعمار في الماضي وعلى تحقيق أرباح مشتركة مع الدول الافريقية حاليا حسب الخطاب الهندي الرسمي. كما حاولت الهند، كباقي القوى المؤثرة في افريقيا، تقوية تواجدها العسكري في إفريقيا المجاورة للمحيط الهندي بصفة خاصة. لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، انتقلت الهند من تنظيم دورات تدريبية لصالح بعض الجيوش الافريقية وعمليات حفظ السلام إلى تدخل مباشر مبني على المشاركة في مواجهة القرصنة في المحيط الهندي، إنشاء قواعد عسكرية في افريقيا والمساهمة في تدريبات عسكرية وبيع الأسلحة. كما تسعى أهداف الهند الى حماية المعابر البحرية وتعزيز تواجدها العسكري في المناطق المجاورة للمحيط الهندي قصد مواجهة المخاطر المتفاقمة الناجمة خاصة من الصين، القوة المنافسة لها. تسعى نوايا الهند كذلك الى تعزيز مكانتها الدولية وتأثيرها في خضم تضاعف المنافسة الرامية الى صياغة موازين القوى على الصعيد الدولي والتحولات الجيوستراتيجية المتوقعة في المستقبل القريب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الهند، افريقيا، الصين، القوة البحرية، المحيط الهندي

Abstract:

Like other world major powers, India has sought to strengthen its economic partnership with Africa. However, it emphasized a specific model that enhanced historic ties based on solidarity and common anti-colonial struggle in the past and currently on mutual benefits with the African countries, according to official discourse. Like other foreign actors, India attempted to consolidate its military presence in the African region adjacent to the Indian Ocean in particular. To achieve this objective, it moved from providing training to African armies and participating in peacekeeping missions to a direct engagement based on the contribution to fight piracy in the Indian Ocean, building military bases overseas, conducting joint military exercises and selling arms. India's stake aims at protecting naval routes and reinforcing its military presence in the adjacent Ocean to counter the perceived growing threats from its notably presumed Chinese rival. It aims, also, at boosting New Delhi's international status and influence in the increasing competition over shaping the world power balance and the related geostrategic changes expected to take place in the near future.

Keywords: India, Africa, China, naval power, Indian Ocean.

Corresponding author: Belkacem Iratni