

Indo - African Defence Cooperation: Need For Enhanced Thrust

*Arvind Dutta**

General

The African Continent, rich in minerals and other natural resources, has been figuring prominently in the world affairs in the post Cold War era, for a variety of reasons. The positive aspects in its recent history relate to its success in getting rid of the colonial yoke as also the vestiges of racialism targeted at its people. The negative facets are epitomised by the numerous internecine conflicts among the people as also the pandemics, and the resultant spiral of violence, death and misery, which serve as obstacles in its path towards development and progress. Nonetheless, the improvement in the political and economic situation, discovery of vast oil and gas reserves and the ongoing restructuring of many African economies has turned the continent into a much sought after destination. Economically emergent India is also better equipped than ever before to exploit its historical linkages and traditional friendship with Africa for mutual benefit. Towards this end, the medium of defence cooperation, especially Army to Army cooperation, should be increasingly used for enhancing the existing political and economic ties. Though a number of training teams have been imparting training to African militaries, however, notwithstanding the progress made so far, a lot more could be done in this sphere.

*Colonel Arvind Dutta is a Research Fellow at IDSA.

Engagement of Africa by Outside Powers

United States. The United States recognises the “evolutionary change the continent is undergoing” and is partnering with Africans to find African solutions to problems related to health care, conflict resolution and good governance. This intent was emphasised during the visit to the African region by President Bush in February 2008. In the six days of his visit, President Bush visited Tanzania, Benin, Ghana, Liberia and Rwanda. Some of the important US –Africa issues are as follows:-

- US currently imports 18% of its oil requirements from Africa. This requirement is likely to rise to 25 percent within the next decade. Algeria and Nigeria, both members of OPEC, and Angola are among the top ten oil suppliers to the US market.
- The United States has provided over \$400 million to the AU for peacekeeping operations in Darfur in the last four years alone. It also aims to augment African Union (AU) peacekeeping capabilities through initiatives like the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance (ACOTA) program, which involves working with a number of African militaries to build up an AU standby force of 25,000 troops to respond to emergencies.
- To have a more focused approach on security dynamics in Africa; it has decided to establish a new geographic military command for the continent – the US Africa Command (AFRICOM). Despite intensive campaign of consultations on the continent, American efforts to headquarter AFRICOM in Africa have met with resistance.

China. China has primarily invested in Africa in order to secure access to the region's natural resources, to fuel its expanding economy. An important

highlight of the China – Africa burgeoning relationship was the hosting of a China-Africa summit by China in October 2006, which was attended by almost 50 African heads of state and Ministers. China is now active in every part of Africa. Its energy related initiatives are focused on Sudan, Angola and Nigeria. China has pledged to double development assistance to Africa by 2009. Further, it has promised to provide about \$20 billion in infrastructure and trade financing to Africa over the next three years. Having already written off debts of almost \$1.5 billion in Africa, it may oblige them with writing off similar amounts again in future. As far its military engagement with Africa is concerned, following issues merit attention:-

- The PLA now reportedly maintains a growing military presence on the African continent. Estimates range from approximately 1,200 soldiers, including PKO forces, to more than 5,000. Its military-to-military contacts, which extend to three-fourths of African nations, provide an arrangement of military relations from which it can pursue its future initiatives in Africa. Further, it is conducting high-level and technological military cooperation and exchanges, as also training African military personnel.
- China's military-to-military activities in Africa, including Defence Attaché presence, naval ship visits, arms sales and other missions to support military cooperation can be expected to expand to keep pace with China's growing national interests throughout the region.
- An increase in its diplomatic military representation and overall presence may get encouraged indirectly by establishment of the new United States Africa Combatant Command, which may impinge on China's security interests in the region.

Increased Area of Interest of European Nations. The major West European powers, especially Britain and France, have also revived or expanded their links with the nations of Sub-Saharan Africa. European firms represent roughly two-thirds of the total FDI in Africa. More than half of European investment originates from the UK and France, going mainly to countries with which they have historic ties. French oil companies such as Total, locked out of the Middle East due to France's opposition to the Iraq war, have made large investments in Francophone countries such as Cameroon, Chad, and Gabon. The European military aid deliveries and arms sales to Africa are likely to be stepped up as a result of growing commercial engagement. Of 12,000 French troops engaged in peacekeeping operations around the world, nearly half are deployed in Africa in both military and advisory capacities, according to the French Ministry of Defence. There are three main French bases in Africa. The largest is at Djibouti, with smaller forces at Dakar in Senegal and Libreville in Gabon. Their purpose is to promote regional security, though the base in Djibouti allows France to exercise a measure of military influence in the Middle East. (Also in Djibouti are about 1,500 American personnel of the Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa, stationed at the former French base Le Monier since 2003.) There is also a small French force on Reunion Island, a French territory located off the coast of Madagascar.

India - Africa Relations

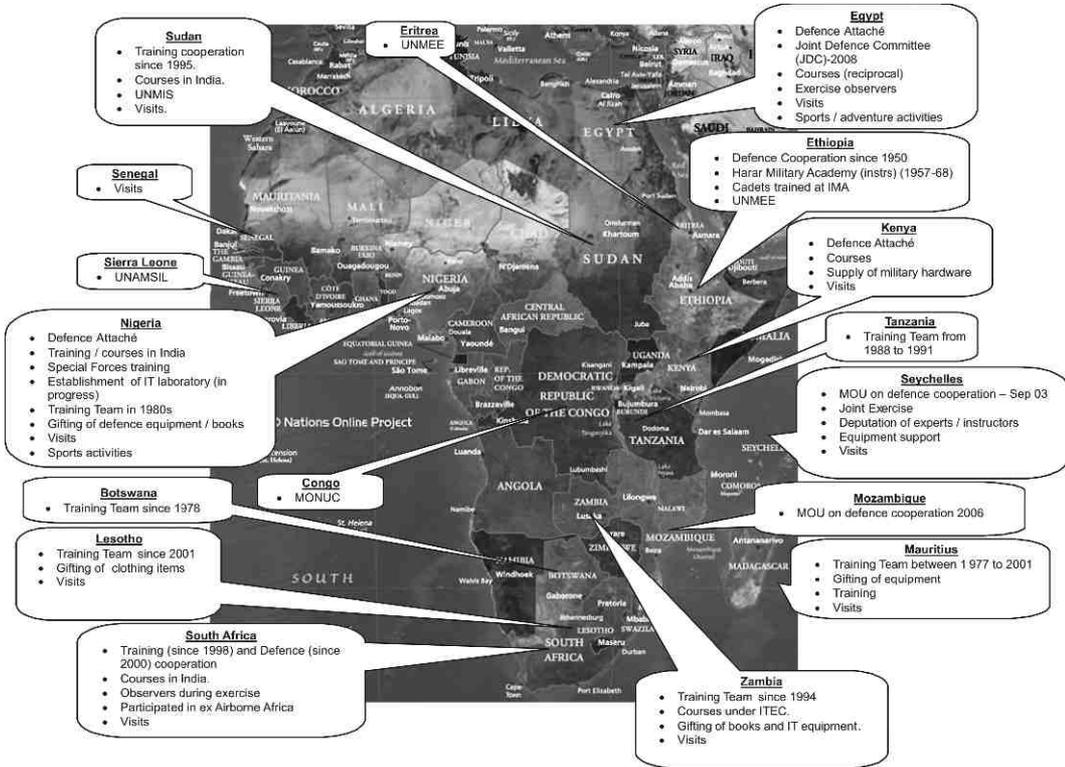
General. India's relations with Africa are conditioned and energised by our historical linkages and strong political foundations of the past. India has, over a period of time, initiated several economic collaboration arrangements with the countries of Africa. These include India's membership of the African Development Bank, assistance under the India's Technical and Economic Cooperation programme, credit arrangements, both through governmental channels and through the Exim Bank of India, and several initiatives within the multilateral G-15 grouping

and the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. Africa is the emerging market for Indian products and enterprise and an alternative source of energy security for India.

Military Engagement. India, with the second largest army in the world, has portrayed itself as a responsible stakeholder in the international system and has gainfully employed its military in defence cooperation activities at the global level. As part of its defence cooperation, India has extended training to a large number of African military officers, over the years, in various military institutions. Currently, India has military-to-military cooperation activities, primarily related to the training fields, with almost one-third of the 54 African nations. India, one of the largest contributors to peacekeeping in Africa, has participated in all the UN peacekeeping missions in Africa and currently has sizeable contingents in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Southern Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Important highlights of the training being pursued presently are as follows:-

- India has deployed military training teams in a number of African countries viz. Botswana, Zambia, Lesotho and Seychelles. Training teams were earlier deployed in Nigeria and Tanzania also. We have our Defence Attaché located in Egypt, Kenya and Nigeria. Further, a number of military-to-military cooperation events are being progressed with other nations as well.
- A significant number of military officers from African countries have been undergoing training courses in India at various levels. Our high standards of training and infrastructural facilities are a major contributing factor for the same. Availability of English speaking officers, among the African armies, to a great extent, facilitates imparting of training to officers. However, training of personnel below the officer's rank is highly constrained due to language problems.

Major Defence Cooperation Activities with African Countries



- India has participated in all UN peacekeeping missions in Africa. As a consequence, Indian army contingents have played an important role in training army personnel in conflict afflicted countries like Congo, Sudan, Mozambique, Rwanda and Angola as part of post conflict peace building. Supply of military hardware to few countries like Kenya and Sevchelles; have been undertaken in the past.

Recommended Enhanced Defence Cooperation Profile

A constructive engagement of African countries is in our long term strategic interest. With increased signatures of US and China in Africa, it is prudent that measures are taken to engage African countries more

effectively. It is felt that the tool of military diplomacy should be more viably utilised to further strengthen overall relations between India and African nations. Further, cooperation with countries, those extend strategic spin-offs, must be pursued vigorously. India also needs to adopt a proactive policy of engaging Africa militarily, both the regional groups as also the individual countries. Additionally, building capacity of the African Union forces especially in the fields of logistic management and communication and information systems for which it is largely dependent on external support is considered very important. It is also pertinent that stronger military ties with African nations would provide excellent opportunities to enhance India's influence in this increasingly important region. The engagement with relevant countries needs to be classified based on the strategic importance and the likely spin-offs. Notwithstanding, a gradual and deliberate approach is imperative. The recommended courses of actions are:-

- Enhance levels of military to military engagement with leading countries like South Africa, Nigeria, Angola, Ghana and Kenya through institutionalised defence cooperation mechanism including staff talks, as part of strategic level framework.
- Maintain evenhanded interaction with countries like Seychelles, Lesotho, Egypt and Ethiopia through institutionalised defence cooperation mechanism including staff talks at functional level.
- It is also felt prudent to undertake military-to-military activities with additional countries as well, on case to case based requirements. These activities could be based on the areas of interest evinced by a country or our needs. The prospective areas for military to military cooperation with African countries could devolve on goodwill visits, establishing training infrastructure and placement of additional training teams, where necessitated.

Combined exercises with peacekeeping focus in addition to assistance in development or refinement of doctrine, intelligence and logistics could be considered.

- Cooperation in tackling non-conventional threats – drugs and small arms, English language training and distant education programmes to invite enhanced participation.
- Regarding Maritime Security, India needs to establish a system of regional cooperation with the Indian Ocean littoral countries to combat threats emanating from non-state actors, particularly those related to terrorism, armed robbery and piracy.
- Exploring feasibility of conduct of multilateral defence cooperation events involving select Africa nations, India and US AFRICOM components.
- Supply of military hardware is another area which merits additional impetus.

Conclusion

Today Africa factors more significantly in the security and geostrategic considerations of outside actors than it did before and is fast emerging as one of the most sought after destination for bilateral engagement. Countries like US and China have already taken important lead in engaging Africa. In the interest of long term security and mutual benefit, India, therefore, needs to give a renewed focus for forging stronger relations with African nations and towards this end must step up its defence cooperation initiatives with Africa in a spirit of mutual trust and confidence. 