

India–Nigeria Defence Cooperation

Contexts, Drivers and Prospects

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Nigeria and India have a long history of cordial and robust bilateral relations and defence cooperation. This article examines the nature, contexts, drivers, content and future of defence cooperation between the two countries in terms of continuity and change. It analyses how global and African currents including rivalry amongst world powers and the new scramble for Africa, as well as transformations and changes in the conceptions and challenges of security, have shaped defence relations between them. From the 'traditional' and more historically continuous domains of peacekeeping, military training and capacity-building, the scope of cooperation has expanded to include non-kinetic approaches to defence, counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, cybersecurity, research and development, medical security, and maritime security in the oceans and blue economy. The article shows that defence cooperation has been revitalised and enlarged since Nigeria's return to civil democracy in 1999, and concludes that although Nigeria and India are unequal partners and Nigeria is more dependent on India's benevolent power, military goods and services, defence cooperation has been mutually beneficial to both countries.

Keywords: *India, Nigeria, Defence Cooperation*

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INTRODUCTION

Defence cooperation, the most common form of institutionalised defence cooperation between states, has featured prominently in bilateral relations between India and Nigeria. It has also featured in India's relations with Africa as a whole, which in many respects, provides a complementary context for analysing larger issues in India–Nigeria cooperation. This article examines the nature of India–Nigeria defence cooperation, in terms of its contexts, drivers, instruments, dynamics and possible future trajectories. The analysis shows that cooperation between the two countries has been fairly consistent and cumulative, and is an integral part of the cordial relationship that both countries have enjoyed since Nigeria became independent in 1960. Today, Nigeria is not only India's largest trading partner in Africa, it is also a major supplier of crude oil to India (fifth largest supplier in 2021).¹ In addition to the Indian community in Nigeria estimated at 50,000 being the largest in West Africa, there are over 135 Indian-owned businesses in Nigeria (the Nigerian population in India made up mostly of students and traders is estimated to be over 10,000).²

Nigeria is also a major power in West Africa and Africa, and plays a crucial role in the Gulf of Guinea, which has attracted India's attention as part of its larger interests in the emergent maritime rivalries among world powers. There are several reasons as to why Nigeria will be of strategic interest to India and India to Nigeria. Since Nigeria returned to civil democracy in 1999, bilateral relations have increased in volume and significance after a lull in the 1990s. In particular, defence cooperation has been rekindled and expanded to address changing spheres and challenges to security that demand new frameworks and approaches.

It is within these contexts that this article examines the key elements of India–Nigeria defence cooperation, and their continuities and changes. A. Michael has identified four distinct elements of India's defence engagements with Africa: participation in UN peacekeeping operations; training of African officers in India; involvement of the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean and increasingly Gulf of Guinea; and Indian defence industry in Africa.³ While these elements provide a useful guide, they emanate from the standpoint of India's priorities and do not capture the full breadth of defence cooperation with individual countries which are driven by more contextual specificities and needs. In the Nigerian case, terrorism, insurgency, violent extremism and sea piracy have most recently driven the quest for external support and defence cooperation with India and other powers. The Indian slant of Michael's

submission also touches on a background element that has provoked some debate among scholars on the direction and benefits from India's defence deals with Africa.

In view of India's status as a global power and its rivalry with other powers, especially China, some of the questions being asked are: Are the deals altruistic, win-win, equitable, mutually beneficial, and based on Africa's self-determined priorities, as India insists they are, or are they driven by India's national interest and strategic calculations in the new scramble for Africa? It is hoped that the Nigerian case analysed in this article will help in providing answers to some of these questions. One tentative answer will be that although India's status as a military power makes her a senior partner that is able to help Nigeria address pressing security challenges, the benefits of defence cooperation are mutual. The rest of the article is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the literature and sets out the analytical lenses for the article. The second focuses on the drivers, instruments and contents of cooperation, and the third section presents the conclusions.

ANALYTICAL LENSES

This section briefly reviews the literature on India–Nigeria defence relations and teases out pertinent conceptual frames that guide analysis in the rest of the article. Defence relations between India and Nigeria are generally analysed within the larger framework of all encompassing bilateral relations between the two countries, as well as India's relations with Africa as a whole. This is evident in the recent literature, in which the focus has been more on issues of trade, investments, energy, technology, regional integration and sustainable development.⁴ The slant is reflective of the dominance of these issues in neoliberal paradigms of post-Cold War global political economy, but the wider contexts have also had significant implications for conceptions of defence and security. For example, according to Wagner, the recognition that peace and security are pre-conditions for the full realisation of economic and political aspirations is one of the compelling reasons for the flurry of reviews and expansions of India–Africa defence cooperation in the recent past.⁵

Indeed, the connections between economic and social relations and defence and security have moved the lenses of analysis away from issues of sovereignty, military capabilities and war, to those of human security, social infrastructure, poverty reduction, equity, social justice and sustainable development. Also, the global flows of technology, people, non-state actors,

goods, ideas, conflict, terrorism and so on across state boundaries and cyberspace, as well as common threats posed by the effects of climate change, pandemics, natural disasters and war, have made sharing and cooperation imperative for national defence and security, as it has become almost impossible for any state to face these issues alone.

It nevertheless remains the case that the levels of sharing and dependence on external support differ across states, with those classified as fragile states being the most vulnerable and dependent on outside support.⁶ By virtue of its population, economic power, technological advancement, and military power, India is one of the regional and emergent global powers that weak states look up to for assistance. Many African states are attracted to India because of the strong historical links and the country's leadership and advocacy of South-South collaboration. In particular, the goodwill demonstrated in two critical areas has placed India high on the list of Africa's friends and security partners. The first is India's active participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in Africa. In 2014–15, 80 per cent of Indian peacekeeping troops were deployed to various war zones in Africa. The second is support for peace and security initiatives of the UN and African Union (AU). India has supported the AU's Peace and Security Architecture and operation of the African Standby Force and contributed US\$ 2 million and US\$ 1 million to the UN Trust Fund in support of the African Union Mission in Somalia in 2011 and 2021 respectively. These commitments have earned India the status of 'net security provider' and 'preferred security partner' in Africa,⁷ and is evident in the large number of defence partnerships with several countries including Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, South Africa, Ethiopia, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Uganda.

Notwithstanding the obvious attraction to India, however, the presumed inequalities in status and terms of its agreements with African states has led some scholars to question whether the cooperation agreements are altruistic, benevolent, or driven by India's strategic interests.⁸ Does India act differently from other global powers, whose interests in Africa are generally perceived to be exploitative and self-serving? More specifically, is India involved in the new scramble for Africa's resources, and how much of its engagements in Africa, for example, is propelled by the desire to counteract Chinese incursions—and incursions by other powers as well?

One school of thought holds that the asymmetric terms of India's trade and investment relations with Africa are similar to those of the global North and that India is a major player in the new scramble for Africa. For example,

A. Michael argues that India's increased partnerships with Africa are done with a view to potentially assuming the role of 'game changer' in the new scramble for Africa's resources and the struggle for votes and support of African states in international institutions and fora'.⁹ India however rejects imputations of such neo-imperial intentions that take their cues from the notion of a hierarchical world order and insists that its motives are noble and altruistic, in the spirit of South-South solidarity and historical ties with Africa. In a keynote address at the India–Africa Defence Dialogue (IADD) on 18 October 2022, Shri Rajnath Singh, Indian Minister of Defence articulated India's position thus: 'We do not believe in making or becoming a client or satellite state, and so, when we partner [with] any nation, it is on the basis of sovereign equality and mutual respect'.¹⁰

Also, in a speech at the Ugandan Parliament in 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasised that India does not impose its will on any partner in Africa and that cooperation priorities are determined by Africans themselves. India's interest, according to the Prime Minister, is to halt the scramble for Africa and join forces with African states in the pursuit of open oceans for the benefit of all, and a just, representative, and democratic global order.¹¹ In relation to defence relations, Indian authorities insist that military cooperation is demand-driven, win-win, and mutually beneficial, and based on the principles of SAGAR, that is, Security and Growth for All in the Region (which is an extrapolation from its avowed vision for the Indo-Pacific region), and 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', the world is one family.

Thus, India has sought to present itself as a friendly and benevolent power whose shared circumstances of colonial exploitation and oppression, common problems, and belief in equal partnership make her a more genuine and trusted partner for African states. If nothing else, her contributions to peacekeeping operations show friendliness and commitment to the peace and stability of the continent. But this does not detract from the fundamentality of India's national interest in furthering its geopolitical and economic interests and global aspirations, whether in rivalry with China, promotion of Indo-Pacific vision, maritime security, or its quest to reform and play an advanced role, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, in the global multilateral system. The slant of national interest sometimes gives the imprint of what Agbu calls 'sub-imperialism'.¹² For example, Dutt points out that the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) programme of which Africa is said to be the largest recipient is 'basically a programme to highlight the enlightened self-interest of India in its economic relationships with developing countries'.¹³

Akinrinade and Ogen have also argued that ‘Indian foreign aid does not differ radically from other big power aid programmes in motive or goals. India’s aid to Nigeria fits perfectly into the schema that sees aid as a means of advancing the donor state’s private economic interests’.¹⁴ While these may be so, the benefits of the cooperative acts to African states—and on comparatively softer terms—cannot be denied. This is more so that, as is the case with Nigeria’s most recent defence cooperation acts, cooperation has been focused on areas of Nigeria’s emergent needs, notably training and capacity-building in counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, technological solutions and maritime security. Pretty much the same can be said of cooperation agreements with other African states including the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. To the extent that African and African security needs are the major drivers of agreements, and that India also enters into them to further its foreign policy objectives, we may agree with the Indian position that they are win-win and mutually beneficial. In the Abuja Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Nigeria of October 2007, for example, Nigeria committed to further partnership in the energy (oil and gas) sector and to supporting India’s quest for a permanent UN Security Council seat, amongst others, in exchange for various forms of support pledged by India.

The other important analytical point relates to the larger African and global frameworks within which defence relations between Nigeria and India are located. Globally, until the recent war in Ukraine, the paradigm of interstate warfare had given way to unconventional low-intensity and asymmetric wars and conflicts mostly involving non-state actors, terrorists and violent extremists, as well as cyber wars. This development has moved security beyond the traditional domain of military and kinetic operations to other non-military spheres of human security and sustainable development—as opposed to security as strictly state security. With threats and complications from other domains like cyberspace, climate change, public health, artificial intelligence, and the like, emphasis is gradually moving to preventive and proactive interventions, early warning systems, peace and security, and collaborative efforts hinged on common humanity. These changes have implications for conceptions of security, military doctrines, training, defence capabilities, research and development and inform the focus on peace and security, early warning systems, retraining, research and development in India’s recent cooperation with Africa and Nigeria. At the IADD meeting on the theme, ‘Adopting Strategy for Synergizing and Strengthening Defence and Security Cooperation’, the Indian Defence Minister expressed

the underlying commitment of India and African countries to explore new areas of convergence for defence engagements, including capacity-building, training, cybersecurity, maritime security and counter-terrorism.¹⁵

The world has also witnessed a resurgence of ultra-nationalism and populism that now poses a threat to the supposed benefits of globalisation. This resurgence partly explains the closing of doors to countries and citizens of the global South by countries regarded as traditional allies, and the reviews and re-alignments that are redefining the changing global order, including the push by countries like India, South Africa and Nigeria for a more democratic, equitable and just multilateral system. The war in Ukraine has further accelerated this process. In Nigeria's fight against terrorism and insurgency, for example, disappointment with the level of support by the US and other allies, which led the country to resort to black markets for purchase of weapons and mercenaries at one point, is one of the drivers of renewed defence cooperation with India and other countries.

Africa's cooperation with India provides another crucial frame for understanding Nigeria–India defence cooperation, not only because India has consistently articulated an Africa-wide policy, but also because the African frameworks set the terms for cooperation with individual states. The enunciation of the principles of Indian engagements with Africa in Prime Minister Modi's speech at the Ugandan Parliament in 2018 is a case in point. Another is the acknowledgement of cooperative partnership with Africa, which India intended to renew and upgrade 'with a view to meeting contemporary African requirements' at the 2008 summit, as one of the basis for the 2007 Abuja Declaration on Strategic Partnership between Nigeria and India. The India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), which is regarded as the official platform for relations between India and Africa, was first held in New Delhi in 2008 and, thereafter, in Addis Ababa (2011) and New Delhi (2015)—the summit was to be held in rotation every three years. The importance of IAFS can be gauged from the increased participation by African representatives: from only 14 chosen by the African Union, it rose to 54 in 2015 including 40 presidents and heads of state. Although IAFS focuses on the broad range of India–Africa cooperation (agriculture, trade and investment, ICT, good governance and civil society), the agenda always included new areas of defence concern, which were mostly dealt with under peace and security and blue economy. However, the summit has not been held since 2015, which is a pointer to the discontinuities that affect India–Africa relations (as we see shortly, the India–Nigeria Joint Commission has faced a similar problem).

With particular reference to defence, the most important Africa-wide cooperation framework to date came out of the India–Africa Defence Ministers’ Conclave and Dialogue (IADD), which took place in Lucknow in February 2022. The Defence Conclave and Dialogue took place on the sidelines of India’s Defence Expo (DefExpo), the defence ministry’s main event for showcasing and marketing Made-in-India land, air, naval and homeland security systems and weapons. IADD was convened by the Indian ministries of defence and external affairs and had defence ministers, service chiefs and other delegates from 50 African countries in attendance. The main outcome of the dialogue was the *Lucknow* (also called *Gandhinagar*) *Declaration*, which outlined the key elements of defence cooperation between Africa and India. Under the broad umbrella of promoting peace and security in Africa as envisioned by the AU’s peace and security agenda (as articulated in AU’s *Agenda 2063* and *Silencing the Gun* initiative), the declaration proposed increased collaboration in the areas of peace-building, conflict prevention, management and resolution, exchange of expertise and training to strengthen early warning mechanisms and capacities in the maritime sector, and counterterrorism strategies in compliance with UN counterterrorism protocols. The declaration also committed to increased training slots for African militaries in Indian institutions and deployment of more Indian training teams to Africa, enhanced capability-building of African defence forces, and participation in joint military exercises and humanitarian assistance during natural disasters. The Africans were also invited to patronize India’s defence industry at the DefExpo 2022. The agreement to hold the dialogue biennially on the sidelines of the DefExpo is an indication that IADD will continue to provide an institutionalised framework for India–Africa defence cooperation, including, reviews, changes, fine-tuning, etc., for some time to come.

IADD marked an important step in India’s response to Africa’s changing security landscape, and new security threats and challenges for which new forms of assistance was needed. As was pointed out earlier, some of the changes required the inculcation of new military tactics, doctrines and technologies. Here again, India’s experience in counterterrorism and counterinsurgency operations and advanced technologies came in handy and ostensibly made knowledge transfer and sharing relevant. In addition to offering training and equipment support, India organised and led joint exercises and interfaces. One of the most notable was the joint African–Indian Field Training Exercise, AFINDEX 19, which was conducted in Pune in March 2019. Military personnel from Nigeria participated alongside officers from Egypt,

Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Uganda and Zambia, while officers from DRC, Madagascar and Rwanda attended as observers. AFINDEX offered methodology sharing and training in specialised operational and tactical level planning for peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and anti-mine and humanitarian operations. The maritime domain, whose key components include securing the sea and enhancing the potential of the blue economy, is another priority area of the expanding defence cooperation with Africa especially for India. Although the Indian Ocean is the primary focus, India is also interested in defence cooperation with Africa's littoral states including Nigeria, as part of her involvement in the increasing scramble or wars over oceans and maritime resources. So far India has offered lines of credit (LoCs) to the Indian Ocean states of Mauritius, Seychelles, and Virgin Islands to purchase patrol boats for securing maritime boundaries, and organised joint naval exercises with Nigeria.

The foregoing issues are pertinent to defence relations and cooperation, and present a point of departure for analysing them. Given the global, regional and domestic levels of analysis, and the close connections among them, it can be argued that globalisation, regionalism, geopolitics and realism provide the most appropriate conceptual frameworks for analysing defence cooperation between states.¹⁶ It is within them that the drivers of cooperation including national interest, security threats, coalitions and alliances, and the larger issues of development lie. It is to this that we now turn.

DYNAMICS OF INDIA–NIGERIA DEFENCE COOPERATION: DRIVERS, PLATFORMS AND COMPONENTS

In this section, we analyse the contexts, drivers, instruments and components of India–Nigeria defence cooperation. The approach is historical and although the emphasis is on most recent cooperative activities in the 2000s, the focus is on continuity and change across time.

India–Nigeria defence cooperation has gone through three discernible phases. The first phase covered the period from Nigeria's independence in 1960 to the early 1990s, during which India helped to establish military institutions in Nigeria, train officers of the Nigerian Army, and participate in UN peacekeeping operations alongside Nigerian troops. Indian military assistance, which was the major element of defence cooperation, was an integral part of more robust bilateral relations that saw direct air services between the two countries, and several Indians teaching in Nigerian schools and universities and running business enterprises. One of the high points

of this period was the management of the Nigerian Railway by the Rail of India Technical and Economic Services (RITES) between 1979 and 1982. The second phase, which covered the middle to late 1990s when Nigeria went through ultra-authoritarian military dictatorships that attracted global sanctions and became a pariah state, witnessed a lull, with UN peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and other parts of the world as the only significant points of contact. The third phase begins with Nigeria's return to civil democracy in 1999 until date, and has witnessed a more robust and expansive scope of cooperation. It is in this third phase that defence cooperation qua defence cooperation became more boldly defined in response to changing security threats and challenges transforming, according to Vidhi and Yaruingam (2015), from 'historical friendship' to 'strategic partnership'.¹⁷

MAIN DRIVERS

On the Nigerian side, the most underlying drivers of cooperation are the historical ties between India and Nigeria dating back to the establishment of a diplomatic office in Lagos in 1958, two years before Nigeria gained independence. Cooperation has been further enhanced by several other factors, which include:

- common membership of important international organisations and forums including the UN, NAM, Commonwealth, G-20, G-33 and G-77;
- the involvement of India in Nigeria's social and industrial sectors over the years, including running the railways, and active participation in the educational, pharmaceutical, telecommunication, and iron and steel sectors;
- the relatively large Indian diaspora and business in Nigeria that has enhanced the non-state, citizen-to-citizen relations between the two countries over the years (Indian companies in Nigeria, which number over 135, are the second largest employers of labour after the federal government);
- the long period of joint participation by armies of the two countries in UN peacekeeping operations, and collaboration in other spheres; and
- the fact that Nigeria is India's largest trading partner in Africa.

These factors, facilitated by collaborative platforms, similar circumstances and challenges, and common aspirations to reform the global order, formed

the background to the Abuja Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Nigeria, signed on 15 October 2007:

India and Nigeria are linked by common historical experiences and in the contemporary context are united in the desire to work towards democratic pluralism, tolerance, economic development and social justice. Both are multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-ethnic societies with a vibrant media and civic society. They are both members of the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the G-77 and NAM and have a history and tradition of working closely together in regional and international organizations.

With specific regard to the military, it has been pointed out that 'compatibility between Indian and [Nigerian] military traditions, strategic doctrines, command structures and training protocols has helped defence and security cooperation'—both countries having inherited Anglo-Saxon traditions as former British colonies.¹⁸

Although bilateral relations between India and Nigeria have been robust over the years, there was a lull in the 1990s when Nigeria went through a reign of ultra-authoritarian military rule that eventually attracted global sanctions under General Sani Abacha when the country became a pariah state.¹⁹ The return to democracy in 1999 rekindled and set new paths for Nigeria–India relations. The restoration of Anglo-Saxon traditions of democracy and military subordination to civil authority shared by both countries was a catalyst for renewed defence cooperation, as events since then have shown. This may very well suggest that the aberration of military rule could have been a factor in the decline of bilateral relations already referred to, especially as India cherishes its reputation of being the world's largest democracy. The massive corruption and regime elongation designs that characterised Nigeria's military governments were also destructive of the country's military as a whole, as professionalism, research and development, and modernisation of training institutions, weapons and equipment were retarded. The situation left Nigeria unprepared for the new security threats and challenges of terrorism, insurgency, sea piracy and maritime insecurity, banditry, and violent extremism that confronted the country from the early 2000s and invited external support. Longstanding military ties and larger South-South collaborations, prior experience of dealing with similar threats, advancements in defence capabilities, and increased volumes of trade, investments and development exchanges made India one of the preferred choices for Nigeria. This has been a major driver of defence cooperation

in the 2000s, which has mainly involved training and capacity-building in counterterrorism, counterinsurgency, maritime security, cybersecurity, humanitarian operations, military technology, research and development.

In strictly military terms then, the main driver for Nigeria has been the quest to build and strengthen military capabilities, with the Army taking the front row. This quest has mainly been at the domestic level as Nigeria has not been involved in external wars, except for participation in UN peacekeeping operations in Africa and other parts of the world, and the West African regional peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Joint participation in peacekeeping operations by Nigerian and Indian troops has made peacekeeping training and exercises crucial to defence cooperation. At the domestic level, India has helped to build the capacities and capabilities of the Nigerian military, as we have seen. The advent of terrorism, violent extremism, radicalisation, and insurgencies has however changed the terrain of Nigeria's defence and security needs, in addition to new challenges in the areas of ICT, cyberspace security, medical security and maritime security. India has pledged and provided support to counter some of the emerging threats and needs. Under the 2007 Abuja Declaration on Strategic Partnership, for example, India pledged to establish two Information Technology (IT) laboratories in the defence academies of Nigeria; and in 2021, a team of Indian military experts conducted a training exercise in counter-insurgency and counterterrorism at the Nigerian Army School of Infantry. In the area of medical security, a team of Indian medical officers led by the Director General of the Indian Medical Services (Army) visited Nigeria to explore the possibility of setting up an IV hospital, and in 2021, it was reported that Nigerian soldiers wounded in the fight against terrorism were being treated in India (*Vanguard*, 17 September 2021). India has also initiated maritime security training programmes for the Nigerian Navy.

On the side of India, the main drivers have included the following. First are the country's historical roles of supporting the independence of African states and eradication of apartheid. In the Indian paradigm, decolonisation also entailed helping to build domestic capacities for newly independent states and providing leadership at the global level to protect independence. While the latter was pursued through the Non-Aligned Movement and other multilateral platforms, and contributions to peacekeeping, peace-building and conflict resolution, capacity-building was more direct and involved providing technical and manpower assistance in the establishment of military academies, training of military officers in Indian academies, and deployment of military equipment. Thus, over time, the Indian military helped to establish

the Nigerian Defence Academy, the Naval College in Port-Harcourt, as well as the Command and Staff College at Jaji. Several military officers including Generals Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari, former military heads of state who also became civilian presidents, passed from Indian elite military institutions.

The second and more contemporary driver is the emergence of India as a regional and global economic and industrial power following her massive neoliberal transformation from the 1990s, and aspiration to champion the reform of the global multilateral system. India has also emerged as a big military power. As of 2007, she had the world's third-largest Army, fourth-largest Air Force and seventh-largest Navy, and contributed the largest number of troops, police and other personnel to UN peacekeeping contingents.²⁰ Also, in 2021, India had the world's third largest defence budget (US\$ 60 billion) after the US (US\$ 732 billion) and China (US\$ 261 billion), was the second largest defence importer after Saudi Arabia, and had a huge domestic defence industry with a projected target of US\$ 5 billion by 2025. This burgeoning status brought India increasingly into big-power rivalry for markets, resources, investments and spheres of influence, which in Africa, involved a new scramble for the continent's strategic minerals and other resources, energy sources, oceans and waterways, and geopolitical support.

In this scramble, India has relied on the huge social capital of friendship and trust built through historical ties and soft power diplomacy over the years to deepen and extend its presence and support base in Africa. Dating back to the 1960s, several African states including Nigeria have benefitted from special interventions, training and capacity-building opportunities offered by the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) and Special Commonwealth African Assistance programmes. India has also contributed the largest contingents of troops, police and observers to UN peacekeeping operations in Africa—in 2007, there were over 7,000 troops and observers in Angola, DRC, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra-Leone and Liberia. The expansion of Indian businesses, manufacturers, energy sector, and financial and ICT service providers in Nigeria and across several African countries is evidence of the new phase of India's big power politics.²¹ The expansion and diversification of Indian trade and other relations with Africa, which is one of the more concrete drivers of change, has been explained in terms of the economic gravity model. Following the model, India is projected to have reached the highest potential trade level in commodities with Africa (with the probable exception of oil and gas and other strategic minerals) and therefore needs to move into new and potentially more beneficial areas that

include services, entrepreneurship, ICT (fintech especially), and defence industry.²²

The emergence and increasing influence of BRICS and G-20, and the concerts of medium and emerging global powers in which India is playing key leadership roles as it did in the NAM (India assumed the presidency of G-20 in December 2022), are also to be seen in this light. The same goes for the increased importance of strategic, military, defence and security engagements and cooperation agreements, which have been initiated and reviewed under Indian auspices. With these developments, ‘India now has a potential of assuming the role of “game changer” in the new scramble for Africa’s resources and the struggle for votes and support of African states in international institutions and fora’. A. Michael has accurately placed the ‘paradigm shift’ in India’s foreign policy objectives in perspective. He notes: ‘While...Nehru had laid the foundation of India’s foreign policy in ideational terms – focusing on the primacy of sovereignty, morality, multilateralism and world peace – the India of post-1998, replaced idealism and her moralist bearing with economic pragmatism’.²³

A special case of India’s entry into superpower rivalry, which some regard as one of the most important drivers of the country’s recent policies in Africa, is the rivalry with China and the quest to counteract China’s growing influence in Africa (especially the African Indian ocean states) and the world at large.²⁴ Contrary to suggestions that the rivalry is of recent origin and tied to the emergence of China as a world power, the India–China rivalry in Africa has a long history. In 1962, the failure of several African countries to support India in her border conflict with China led to the realisation that it ‘did not have the strong ally it had hoped for in Africa’.²⁵ Since then, India has ‘actively worked towards countering Chinese penetration in Africa’.²⁶

In the more recent past, the convening of India–Africa Forum summits—in 2008, 2012 and 2015—to address issues of poverty reduction and development, development of the Asia–Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in conjunction with Japan, and introduction of special intervention programmes and credit lines for African countries, were direct responses to increased China penetration of Africa embodied in China’s Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Similarly, India’s increased rapprochement with the US on matters that have relevance for Africa through the US–India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies, which was announced in May 2022, is part of the larger global efforts to checkmate China in Africa and Asia. Although India continues to underplay rivalry with China as a policy-driver, statements by

key officials suggest otherwise. For example, at the first Africa–India Forum Summit in 2008, the then Minister of State, Jairam Ramesh, remarked that ‘the first principle of India’s involvement in Africa is unlike that of China’.²⁷ Similarly, former Prime Minister, Mamohan Singh said ‘We do not seek to impose any pattern in Africa. It is for the African people to decide on their future...We are not in any race or competition with China or any other country’.²⁸

Closely related to checkmating Chinese penetration and growing influence, is India’s resurgence in the maritime domain. The country is one of the leading naval and maritime nations in the world and is said to have the sixth-largest number of seafarers in the world, thereby making piracy of strategic interest. However, India’s maritime interests in Africa have been mainly focused on safeguarding the Indian Ocean, which is part of a larger Indo-Pacific project. The strategic importance of this cannot be overemphasised and is closely linked to energy security: a large percentage of Asian oil and gas is shipped through the Indian Ocean. The mainstay of India’s strategy in Africa has been cooperation and defence pacts with littoral states of the Indian Ocean to enhance their naval defence capabilities. In 2008, India held a joint exercise with Brazil and South African navies, which turned out to be the first major military cooperation in the Global South. In addition, in furtherance of the country’s larger interest in the new sea and water wars over the blue economy, fishing and other resources, India has also entered the Gulf of Guinea, which has emerged as an area of strategic interest for other major powers. The supposed trigger for this was the hostage-taking of 44 Indian seafarers by pirates in the Gulf in 2019. India subsequently announced its entry into the Gulf by participating in the meeting of the G7 Plus Friends of the Gulf of Guinea in August 2020. This has brought the Indian Navy into closer cooperation with Nigeria, which is the biggest West African actor in the Gulf. One of the earliest acts of cooperation took place in June 2017 when, on the occasion of the Nigerian Navy Day, the Indian warship *INS Tarkash* visited Lagos and participated in a joint exercise. In September 2022, *INS Tarkash* again visited Lagos as part of India’s first-ever anti-piracy operation in the Gulf of Guinea.

PLATFORMS AND INSTRUMENTS OF COOPERATION

Having analysed the main drivers of defence cooperation between India and Nigeria and how they have changed over time, let us now consider the platforms and instruments of cooperation which spell out content and

modalities. Because information on defence cooperation from the past remains classified,²⁹ we have to rely on the actual acts of cooperation in peacekeeping operations and Indian assistance in training Nigerian Army officers and establishment of the Nigerian Defence Academy and other military institutions, which nevertheless show that cooperation acts were quite active at the time. The situation has however improved since 1999 when civil democracy was restored in Nigeria, as defence agreements have become more open and transparent. The platforms and instruments of cooperation fall into two broad categories: (1) institutional platforms; and (2) declarations, communiqués and memoranda of understanding (MoU) that embody agreements reached at meetings and exchanges of heads of state and top government officials. Institutional platforms are set up to coordinate and implement agreements and ensure their stability and continuity, while declarations and MoUs tend to be more pragmatic and focused on shorter-term and more immediate concerns.

There are two main institutional platforms. First is the Nigeria–India Joint Commission, which was established in 1979 to coordinate and ensure the implementation of bilateral relations as a whole. The commission met in 1981, 1989, 2000, 2003, 2007 and 2011, and has not met since then. The inactivity of the joint commission does not suggest a lull in bilateral activities which, to the contrary, has increased on several fronts. Rather, it might explain the implementation gaps that have characterised agreements in several areas, as pledges and commitments in existing agreements sometimes remain on paper. It is instructive that recent meetings between Indian and Nigerian officials have emphasised the need to resuscitate the commission. The second institutional platform, which is more specifically tasked with defence cooperation, is the Joint Defence Coordination Committee (JDCC), which oversees the implementation of bilateral defence cooperation in various MoUs. JDCC has met six times since its inaugural meeting in New Delhi in April 2003, with the last known meeting in 2020 in Abuja. Again, because of the classified nature of the work of the committee, details of these meetings are not known.

The second category of platforms consists of meetings and exchanges that have produced communiqués, declarations, agreements and MoUs. The historical trajectory shows an unprecedented increase in the volume of meetings and exchanges in the 2000s, which indicates closer and expanded defence ties, in apparent response to the emergent challenges of defence and security and the changing world order. Our focus will be on these more recent agreements which, unlike past agreements that have yet to be declassified, are

more open. Also, the meetings have been complementary and cumulative, in the sense that successive meetings have reiterated and updated agreements and commitments reached at earlier meetings. The major meetings and exchanges and their points of agreement include the following:

- (i) At the end of an official visit by the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh to Nigeria from 14 to 16 October 2007 at the invitation of the President of Nigeria Musa Yar'Adua, the two leaders issued the Abuja Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Nigeria. The Declaration outlined agreements on bilateral relations in general, and about defence, agreed to strengthen and expand the scope of cooperation beyond the 'traditional' UN peacekeeping operations, to the fight against international terrorism and drug trafficking.
- (ii) A virtual meeting between the foreign ministers of India and Nigeria in September 2020 produced a communiqué that recalled their extensive cooperation in the field of defence training and capacity-building and expressed satisfaction that it was expanding to newer areas such as defence equipment support, medical and maintenance services, sharing of intelligence and R&D expertise in counterterrorism and counter-insurgency, and information sharing between the Indian Navy and Nigerian Navy as well as increased surveillance for maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea. The ministers urged the armed forces of both countries, to continue to work together in the ongoing efforts to counter-terrorism, insurgency and piracy, and agreed that MoUs would be signed on the new areas of cooperation. The signing of the MoU on Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space in the same year showed how seriously cooperation in the new frontiers was being taken.
- (iii) In March 2021, Nigeria and India held the first Strategic and Counterterrorism Dialogue at the level of National Security Advisers at which common threats like armed extremism and radicalisation were discussed.
- (iv) In September 2021, an Indian Defence Scoping delegation comprising officers of the Indian Army, Air Force and Navy, and officials of the National Security Council Secretariat and ministries of Defence and External Affairs held meetings with the Nigerian Minister of Defence, National Security Adviser, Chief of Army Staff, and defence industry stakeholders, to explore ways of further expanding the scope of defence cooperation to cover new and rapidly changing geopolitical landscapes, cyberspace threats, technologies and other challenges. The meetings identified medical security, ICT, well-equipped special forces able to

deliver faster and more accurate responses, development of detonation of Improvised Explosive Devices, and defence (research and development) think tanks as new areas of cooperation for addressing the emerging challenges (*Vanguard*, 17 September 2021).

CONTENT AND TERMS OF DEFENCE COOPERATION

To round up this section, we shall briefly highlight the content and terms of India–Nigeria defence cooperation. As discussed earlier, the scope of cooperation has expanded from military training, the establishment of military academies, exchange of officers, equipment and logistics support, and UN peacekeeping operations, which may now be regarded as the traditional and historically more continuous areas of cooperation, to cybersecurity, naval operations, ICT support, medical security, maritime security, early warning systems, counter-insurgency, counterterrorism, research and development, and special forces. One other critical area of defence cooperation that has so far not been addressed is defence procurement and supplies, which may be regarded as a reflection of the direction and depth of cooperation. Nigeria has been identified as one of the countries with the most diverse sources of military procurement in Africa. Its military equipment and logistics support come from over 20 countries, including the US, Italy, Germany, Bulgaria, Russia, China, Korea, Japan, Slovakia, Turkey, Ukraine, Canada, Sweden, France, Belgium, Brazil and Austria. India's proportion of Nigeria's procurement and supplies has remained rather insignificant, despite the country's huge military-industrial complex.

The few defence procurements have involved Tata which supplied trucks in the 1990s, Ashok-Leyland, which supplied 700 troop-carrying trucks assembled in Nigeria by Stallion Motors to the Nigerian Army in February 2023, and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, which commenced the training of Nigerian Army training pilots in July 2021. Indian firms also built IT laboratories in the NDA and Command and Staff College at Jaji. One possible explanation for the low involvement of India might be that defence cooperation agreements have so far not included sales of weapons. Another possible explanation is that information on Nigeria's procurements from India is scanty and shrouded in secrecy.³⁰ Even so, India is known to have supported the Nigerian military with sundry items. For example,

At the third session of the Nigeria–India Joint Commission held in Abuja in 2000, the Indian side indicated that it would assist the Nigerian military in

the following areas: refurbishment of the NAF MIG-21 and Jaguar Aircraft; repair of Dornier 228 aircraft and the supply of spare parts; provision of fast-track patrol boats, offshore patrol vessels;...computerization of military equipment; defence production including manufacture of small arms and ammunition...and so on.³¹

Still, Nigeria's patronage of India's defence industry remains low. Two recent developments are however likely to change this. First is the difficulty Nigeria has had in procuring weapons to deal with terrorism and insurgency from traditional allies like the US, which refused to sell weapons including Tucano jets to Nigeria for a long time ostensibly because of alleged human rights infractions by the Nigerian Army. At one point, the country had to resort to pirate or black market procurement from South Africa and the use of mercenaries to fight terrorists—in 2014, US\$ 15 million including US\$ 9.5 million in cash onboard a private jet meant for black market procurement was confiscated by South African authorities.

Second, is the notion of defence transformation in Nigeria's military lexicon, which signifies the imperative of 're-equipping, retooling, modernizing and repositioning Nigeria's military...and informed military spending'.³² Technology, research and development, and defence space agency are crucial to defence transformation, and these are areas already identified in the most recent cooperation agreements between Nigeria and India. This creates the opportunity for the Indian defence industry to make inroads into Nigeria, more so that Indian authorities have organised the IADD meetings on the sidelines of the DefExpos and wooed African states to patronize the Indian defence industry and technologies (because their military equipment and weapons are more affordable, available, adaptable, and offer the opportunity for joint manufacturing and training. Wapmuk has noted that the DefExpo invitation is already taking effect:

...following DefExpo 2020, the Ordinance Factory Board (OFB), Goa Shipyard Ltd (GSL), Bharat Electronics (BEL), Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), and Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers were among the Indian companies that indicated strong interest in cooperating with Nigeria. The Nigerian Navy and other maritime organizations were invited by PIPAVAV Defence and Offshore Engineering Ltd to their shipyard.³³

In April 2021, the Nigerian Army signed the MoU with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd for the training of O6X Nigerian Army aviation pilots. The first batch commenced training in July 2021.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the nature, contexts, drivers and dynamics of India–Nigeria defence cooperation, it is clear that in virtually all the areas of cooperation, India has been the main supplier of military goods and services including training and capacity building, living up to the billing of ‘net security provider’ to Nigeria.³⁴ In effect, although the India–Nigeria defence cooperation has been between two unequal partners, but the cooperation has nevertheless been mutually beneficial. It has enhanced Nigeria’s military capabilities in the face of new challenges, and it has helped India to (i) strengthen its peacekeeping operations which require partnership with contingents from other countries (Nigeria and India have been joint participants in peacekeeping operations since Congo in 1960); (ii) further its interests in the maritime domain especially in the Gulf of Guinea (the Nigerian Navy played a key role in the rescue of 44 Indian seafarers who were abducted by pirates in 2019); (iii) solidify India’s larger interests and appeal in West Africa, Africa and the rest of the Global South in the face of the new scramble for Africa and intensified superpower rivalry with China and others (Nigeria being a regional power in Africa); and (iv) enhance its bilateral relations with Nigeria, its largest trading partner in Africa, especially in trade, investments, energy and the blue economy.

We conclude the paper by concurring with the following assertion by Singh and Mishra: ‘strengthened cooperation on security will play a vital role in whether India remains a largely normative actor on these issues in Africa, or if it is capable of growing its profile through more active and direct bilateral security interventions on the ground. If the latter is to prevail, a fine balance will need to be achieved that centres African agency within new security cooperation mechanisms, and which is based on mutual understanding, respect and benefit’.³⁵

NOTES

1. According to 2021–2022 estimates, Nigeria’s trade volume of US\$ 16.36 billion ranked first in Africa’s total trade with India (US\$ 89.5) and twelfth of India’s largest trading partners in the world.
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10. "India does not believe in hierarchical world order": Rajnath Singh at IADD', *Hindustan Times*, 18 October 2022, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-does-not-believe-in-hierarchical-world-order-rajnath-singh-at-iadd-101666103984938.html>
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