

# Maritime Security in the Global South

## Challenges and Prospects for Africa–India Defence Cooperation

**Godwin Ichimi\***

*The article is set against a backdrop of the common cultural and historical ties between Africa and India. It focusses on the maritime safety and security facet of the Africa–India defence cooperation arrangements. The article submits that given the importance as well as the opportunities that the oceans hold for countries, the maritime facet of the defence cooperation needs to be creatively deepened and extended. In other words, extant India–African defence cooperation is not only necessary, it is, from a strategic point of view, imperative to the process of assuring sustainable security and economic prosperity in the maritime domains of the African and Indian subcontinents. Under the auspices of these cooperation arrangements, it is possible to further crystallise and advance African and Indian maritime interests into areas of new and/or renewed opportunities including but not limited to joint trainings and capacity building, the blue economy, intelligence sharing and knowledge transfer, maritime domain awareness, seabed exploration and mining, etc. Such arrangements must not only be seen in the short term but must be broken into their medium- and long-term elements if an effective, safe and secure Africa–India maritime development agenda is to be achieved.*

**Keywords:** *Maritime Security, India, Africa, Defence Cooperation*

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\* Dr Godwin Ichimi is affiliated to the Center for Ocean Governance and the Blue Economy, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, Lagos, Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between India and the continent of Africa goes back centuries. Brought together by common cultural ties and historical experiences, Africa and India bear the torch as drivers of future global growth. They also face the common disadvantages occasioned by their being amongst the last entrants to join the global economic growth and development trajectory. Given their shared colonial past, it was only natural that independent India's first outreach to the world was to Africa as a leader of the Bandung Conference in 1955.<sup>1</sup> At Bandung South–South cooperation was seen and adopted as the most veritable mechanism for the protection and advancement of the collective interests of the Global South.<sup>2</sup>

The areas of collaboration that were contemplated at strategic and policy levels were cross-cutting and over the years have continued to ramify as India–Africa relations evolved at multilateral and bilateral levels. At the policy level, there is a convergence between India and African states on myriad issues. To illustrate, both India and many African countries continue to make a case for the widening of the UN Security Council membership to increase the inclusion of developing countries. Also, India has maintained her position as an international advocate of nuclear disarmament, even as the Africa Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty had been set in motion since 2009.<sup>3</sup>

The level of security and defence cooperation between India and Africa has taken on a robust root, requiring only further extensions, modifications and deepening. Standing out in this regard are maritime security and defence cooperation as both India and Africa are major actors with extensive stakes in the global maritime ecosystem. It is important to mention here that the Indian Ocean ropes together Africa, the western wall of the vast ocean and part of the roof making the northern boundary. Even before the advent of the Europeans, the maritime corridor had historically connected the Indian and African sub-continent: seasonal trade brought cereals, vegetable crops and iron from Sudan, Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa into India and carried Indian spices, cotton and textiles to the eastern coast of the continent and even beyond.

Against this backdrop, this article revisits the evolving character of the maritime aspects of the Africa–India defence cooperation arrangement and highlights not just their respective maritime threat profiles but, equally important, the need to crystallise and advance African and Indian interests into areas of new and/or renewed maritime opportunities.

## THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE SECURITY COMMONS

The Indian Ocean is a global geo-strategic axis. It is not only that the body of water serves as home to 40 per cent of the world's population, but it also incorporates more than 50 per cent of the world's oil and 45 per cent of the world's gas reserves and a huge seabed of mineral resources. Equally important is the fact that the region boasts of an active sea lane that plays host to more than half of the world's container shipments, including two-thirds of oil shipments across the world.<sup>4</sup>

However, the Indian Ocean presents security concerns that require responses from both India and other countries in the region as well as the littoral and island states of Africa consisting of Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan and Tanzania. Such growing concern is necessary and expedient for both Africa and India: on the one hand Afro-optimism is growing and is being leveraged upon by Africans; on the other hand, India is taking advantage of its geography to drive her vital interests. Furthermore, the resource-rich eastern African littorals are showing the most promising growth trajectories in the continent and are largely turning towards the Indian Ocean. This was clearly demonstrated in the first India–Africa Forum Summit, declaring the two 'neighbours across the Indian Ocean.'<sup>5</sup> Also worthy of mention is the Addis Ababa Declaration that helps integrate Indian efforts to protect shipping in the Indian Ocean from piracy. Overall, there is growing interest in and recognition of the potential for an all-engaging maritime relationship in these waters in response to the common maritime concerns and prospects of the state parties.<sup>6</sup>

## AFRICA–INDIA DEFENCE COOPERATION AND THE MARITIME DOMAINS OF BOTH THE AFRICAN AND INDIAN SUBCONTINENTS

### Identifying threats in the Indian Ocean

African–India defence cooperation arrangements provide the overarching contexts for the safety and security considerations of the maritime domains of both the African and Indian subcontinents. Piracy in the Gulf of Aden has constituted a deep concern in the Indian Ocean sea lanes of communication. As Somali piracy gained traction, India stepped up as the first nation to conduct anti-piracy operations in the area around 2008. Four years hence, its navy had escorted over 2100 merchant vessels—both Indian and foreign. Its navy has also played a key role in preventing about 40 piracy attempts on such

ships.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps this initiative has also necessitated the appropriate response from Seychelles' coast guard, which has been observed to be increasingly involved in counter-piracy operations in the region.<sup>8</sup> The results of such cooperation have resulted in a decline in piracy threats in the ocean region. It has been observed that from their peak in 2011, when attacks were taking place daily, three years later the surge of piracy had abated significantly.

Another key issue that plagues the region is the issue of ocean governance deficits. In this context ocean governance is highly fragmented with states pushing on multiple fronts across diverse multilateral platforms whose mandates cover issues of illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing, acidification, habitat destruction, marine pollution and shipping among other things. Competitive interests of these state and non-state actors in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) continue to undermine the prospect for the adoption of a holistic, integrated ecosystem management approach. Governance deficits thus foreshadow the danger of possible reversals not only in the progress made in the war against piracy but could also threaten Indian as well as general international trade and energy shipping routes.

Also worthy of mention as one of the emerging threats in the IOR is terrorism. Ever since the terrorist attack of 9/11 on the World Trade Centre in the United States (US), there have been diverse responses and a review of security architectures by countries across the globe. In the case of India, a more effective security design, driven largely by the lessons of the Mumbai attacks of 2008, appears to be in place. There is little doubt that with the availability of the internet, individuals could be radicalised miles away and made to conduct attacks in designated maritime domains by terrorist groups such as Islamic States in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Al Qaeda, Al Shabab, etc. Be that as it may, security and stability to ward off fundamentalism and sympathy with extremist groups such as aforementioned among the youthful populations of the Indian Ocean Rim countries is priority for both India and Africa.<sup>9</sup>

Also plaguing the Indian maritime domain is the challenge of drug trafficking. Sophisticated levels of drug smuggling networks exist across the maritime domain. Myriad interceptions off the eastern African seaboard indicate that an axis had emerged as a leading international trans-shipment hub for narcotic products originating from Southeast Asia, Latin America and South Asia. As a case in point, over 1,300 kilograms of heroin and other narcotics were seized in the first half of 2014 alone in the region,<sup>10</sup> and the challenge persists, though at varying degrees of intensity. In November 2021 alone, the 38-nation Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)

conducted several successful counter-narcotics operations in the IOR, which led among other things to seizures of 975 kilograms of heroin, 523 kilograms of methamphetamine and 4,244 kilograms of hashish. Over the course of the same year, the CMF seized and destroyed 6,550 kilograms of heroin, 4,052 kilograms of methamphetamine and 56, 834 kilograms of hashish.<sup>11</sup>

### **Assessing the realities in the African maritime domain**

Africa exhibits unique safety and security realities in her maritime domain. The continent's peculiar maritime proportions are mirrored in the fact that out of its 54 countries, 38 are either coastal or island states having a vast coastline of 30,725 kilometres. More importantly, about 90 per cent of the continent's total imports and exports are conducted by sea. Abhijit Singh further states that if the illegal market in military arms and logged forest products were to be considered, then the economy of Africa may have a maritime sector estimated at a trillion dollars a year, reflecting a changing 90 per cent of its overall commerce.<sup>12</sup> The Maritime Executive similarly states that:

By 2020, the African port sector had collectively attracted \$50 billion in public and private investments. This has heralded an emergence of world-class ports in Africa spread out in Morocco, South Africa and Egypt. Tangier Med Port was ranked at position 35 in this year's Lloyd's List report on the world's busiest seaports, rubbing shoulders with renowned ports from developed nations such as the UK and USA.<sup>13</sup>

On the trade and economic front, India's bilateral trade with Africa reached US\$ 89.5 billion in 2021–22 compared with USD 56 billion the previous year. With cumulative investments at US\$ 73.9 billion from 1996 to 2021, India is among the top five investors in Africa.<sup>14</sup>

This sterling profile notwithstanding, Africa's maritime ecosystems, at least at some time in the past, appeared not to have been given sufficient attention. The reason for this lack of interest it can be argued is attributable to the relatively underdeveloped levels of naval capabilities among African states, which made naval warfare or the military escalation of maritime disputes a remote prospect. Interestingly, Africa is now increasingly coming to terms with the critical nature of the security of her maritime domain. With a booming mining and oil and gas industry as well as trade, Africa has been on the global stage, drawing the attention of energy consuming countries

such as China, India and the US among others to the waters of its (African) continent. The presence of such activity has generated high levels of sea traffic and consequently various form of maritime crimes. Unfortunately, most African countries do not have effective maritime security architecture to ensure the needed safety and security on their waters.

The nefarious acts of sea criminals, including vast illegal capture of maritime resources have given rise to the clamour and demand for actions from governments and better ocean governance. To worsen the issue, interstate maritime borders have remained poorly defined, with an 'evil promise' of future maritime border disputes. Studies have shown that the prevalence of Somali piracy between 2008 and 2011 attracted the attention of the world to the state of maritime security in Africa, although there are other positions that submit that the situation changed significantly in 2005, when a 'piracy momentum' culminated in some path-breaking maritime security cooperation.<sup>15</sup>

These deficits in maritime security in Africa are further compounded by an almost nonexistence framework or uniform vision for the African maritime economy.<sup>16</sup> A litany of threats that African states face in their coastal areas include illegal fishing, smuggling, narcotics smuggling, illegal immigration and environmental degradation. These unlawful activities and adverse situations have negative impacts on the regional economy especially the fishing sector, which constitutes the main source of protein for the coastal communities and a source of livelihood. They also expose the gap in policing the sector and the lack of infrastructure necessary for responding to crime and criminality in the maritime domain.

Although there have been several regional arrangements in place to respond to the challenge, there is an urgent need for well-structured legal appurtenances in Africa's maritime domains. In fact, in some cases maritime law enforcement and regulations remain highly contested thereby undermining arrests and prosecutions of vessels, individuals and corporate entities who have run foul of the law. As a matter of fact, it could be said that despite the progress achieved in combatting piracy, there are still grey areas. Years back, Orakwusi opined that the lack of adequate definition of the concept (of piracy) has resulted in issues with counter-piracy operations.<sup>17</sup> However, combining article 101 of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) with Article 3 (1) (b) of the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery (ReCAAP) of 28 April 2005 and Article 1 of the Djibouti Code of Conduct, generates the conception of piracy as:

- (a) any illegal acts of violence or detention, or any act of depredation, committed for private ends by the crew or the passengers of a private ship or a private aircraft, and directed: (i) on the high seas, against another ship or aircraft, or against persons or property on board such ship or aircraft. (ii) against a ship, aircraft, persons, or property in a place outside the jurisdiction of any state.
- (b) any act of voluntary participation in the operation of a ship or of an aircraft with knowledge of facts making it a pirate ship or aircraft.
- (c) any act of inciting or of intentionally facilitating an act described in subparagraph (a) or (b).<sup>18</sup>

Nonetheless, the notion of piracy has evolved over the years, taking different trajectories. Its growing dynamism seems to have extended beyond the definition of UNCLOS.<sup>19</sup>

In all, the assessment of Africa's maritime domain can be summed under the following:

- (a) Shortage of efficient frameworks for the delimitation of the maritime zones
- (b) Lack of appropriate policy, legal and institutional frameworks for governance of the maritime zones
- (c) Insufficient training facilities and institutions to develop a pool of competent human resources for the governance process
- (d) Exploration of, and research on marine resources.<sup>20</sup>

#### REASSESSING THE ROADMAP FOR DEFENCE SECTOR COLLABORATION IN THE MARITIME DOMAINS OF INDIA AND AFRICA

India's defence cooperation with countries in Africa is directly linked to the issue of energy security, which is a particularly critical issue for India's economic development and geopolitical stability. India is the world's third largest energy importer and consumer with Africa accounting for about 15 per cent and 10 per cent of its total imports of oil and gas respectively.<sup>21</sup> There is thus the crucial need to secure India's shipping routes, and this the country has done by, among other things, emplacing military cooperation agreements and military training frameworks with Kenya, Seychelles, Mozambique, Madagascar and other countries, especially those adjourning (or having a critical stake in) the IOR under the auspices of its counter-piracy operations.<sup>22</sup> India has also been known to be seeking long-term leases on a group of small islands belonging to Mauritius, given the need for her to

establish bases to protect its energy imports from Africa.<sup>23</sup> In this connection, P. Ghosh opined that:

The islands in the Indian Ocean also work significantly to shape security architecture of the IOR. These islands play a vital role along the sea lines of communication (SLOC) by giving easy access to navies continued presence and allowing them to patrol and secure SLOCs during the time of peace and war. ... The main aim of India in this area is to protect the SLOCs, which are laden with piracy threats in the Horn of Africa and the Red Sea.<sup>24</sup>

Aside piracy, other challenges contributing to the necessity for the establishment of bases to protect India's energy imports from Africa include political instability, terrorism, threats to and disruption of critical energy supply routes and infrastructure and competition from other countries. It is envisioned also that the bases would help safeguard India's trade and military interests, while facilitating India's cooperation with African and other countries on various issues, such as climate change, development and peacekeeping.

Creating an effective map for the defence sector collaboration between India and Africa requires an evolving and credible security design. The resulting maritime security architecture could involve issues such as multilateral cooperation, human and environmental security, technology and equipment, training and capacity-building, etc. The proceeding section will attempt to expand on some of these factors:

### **Multilateral Cooperation**

India–Africa engagements in the Indian Ocean have mostly been bilateral and multilateral especially with countries such as Mauritius, Seychelles and Madagascar. Hallmark events include India's commissioning of the Barracuda, the offshore patrol vessel into its navy, the recent launch of the planned 32 Coastal Surveillance Radar stations in Seychelles by the Indian Prime Minister and the building of a monitoring station in northern Madagascar, which happened way back in 2007. Additionally, India has deepened significant ties with Mozambique and conducted security operations such as regularly patrolling the Mozambique Channel and supplying equipment and training. Further, India and Africa engaged myriad security concerns through forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association comprising Comoros, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium comprising Mauritius, Mozambique,



Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania as members (with Madagascar as an observer).

Several functional multilateral platforms already exist upon which India and Africa could leverage and advance their collective maritime interests and aspirations. The Gulf of Guinea Commission, for one. This is a body that brings together 17 African countries on the west coast. Stretching from Liberia all the way to Gabon it has a total coastline of about 2,874 nautical miles. It covers an estimated area of 5,74,800 square nautical miles. The Gulf is an important transit hub for the bulk of the region's estimated US\$ 253 billion commerce. Presently, 70 per cent of Africa's oil production comes from the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) and, with the possibilities of more discoveries of offshore hydrocarbon deposits, the numbers will likely rise. The current estimate of oil production in the GoG stands at 5.4 million barrels per day.

Africa–India defence cooperation arrangements would serve as an overarching context under which the maritime safety and security goals of the state parties of the two regions will be pursued and actualised.

### **Human security and environmental sustainability**

It is important to note here that responding to any forms of security begins with having the appropriate human security paradigm in place. By so doing, individuals are gainfully employed and do not place themselves in positions where they are soft recruits for violence. To ensure such, there is the need to harness the rich resources of the Indian Ocean for effective use through the cooperation of India and Africa. The Indian and African blue economies bring sustainability of the oceanic and coastal environments together with the economic potential of the waters. But an explicit undertaking to address interrelated environmental effects of human actions and climate change impact with any security ramifications is important. Building and exchanging knowledge on shared challenges and possible solutions, and common action where possible will be vital in these domains. The issue of Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU), for example, is a problem that India and the other maritime countries of Africa are facing in their respective regions. In the same vein, both regions face similar coastal challenges, such as mangrove destruction, urbanisation pressure and climate change stress.<sup>25</sup> When properly organised and structured, the blue economy has the potential to improve the economic positions of India and Africa. Knowledge transfer could therefore be pioneered and coordinated between the countries of the GoG and India.

### **Technology, equipment, joint training and capacity building**

India has in times past conducted regular joint naval exercises with some African countries towards driving a robust defence security arrangement with the continent. Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritius and Seychelles participated in the Milan exercises for the first time in 2014, and South African and Indian navies engage through India–Brazil–South Africa Maritime (IBSAMAR) exercises, of which four successful iterations have occurred thus far. Indian Navy's involvement in anti-piracy operations since 2008 has paved way to greater bilateral interaction with navies in the region.<sup>26</sup> Besides the frequent ship visits, efforts are also being made to share best practices and build capacity through training, transfer of naval hardware and intelligence sharing. In 2007, India's Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Mozambique planned for the maritime patrolling of the waters of Mozambique's coast. The arrangement also made provisions for supplying of military equipment, capacity building and training of her personnel and technology transfer in the maintenance, repairs and handling of military equipment including aircraft and ships. From all indications, this appears to be the security design set in place by India for her African partners.<sup>27</sup>

### **CONCLUSION: IMPROVING INDIA–AFRICA MARITIME COOPERATION**

The preceding parts of this article have demonstrated that there are existing areas of collaborations between India and Africa in the promotion of maritime security. Such areas include but are not limited to intelligence and capacity building, summits and initiatives targeting harnessing of the blue economy and human security enhancement, etc. However, there is need for India and Africa to do more if such collaborations are to be sustainable. It may be necessary for India to improve her efforts in the areas of hydrographic surveys and coast guard operations. India may also come in handy in helping Africa develop a robust African maritime economy and a multifaceted strategy for maritime development. For widening of the horizons of these prospects, India could help in developing a maritime architecture that hosts and promotes security, investments, trade and job creation in the region to set both Africa and India on the paths of prosperity.

Historically, the Global North has been known as the primary consumer of energy although the state of things seems to be changing fast with the emergence of industrial and economic giants from the Global South. India is clearly one of such emerging powers in the Global South with a great deal of domestic energy demand. Africa is clearly an alternative source of energy

supply for India. India–Africa collaboration for the advancement of the goals of sustainable energy production and supply has immense multiplier effect prospects for the economies of the region and can lead to equally significant direct and indirect factor employments in both India and Africa. Recall that one of the primary drivers of insecurity in the maritime domains under consideration is the lack of employment for the growing youth population. Employment deficits lead to the ‘exportation’ of grievances to the sea.<sup>28</sup> To check such ‘export’ requires the provision of job opportunities for the teeming youth population in the countries of both regions.

Another crucial area that holds great promise for India–Africa collaboration is that of Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA). Under proper arrangements, especially the acquisition and deployment of appropriate technologies, coastal communities in Africa could be more informed and involved in the management and control of their maritime environment. India could help identify the needs of the coastal communities in African states. By demonstrating such shared commitments in the maritime sector, India and Africa will sustain an effective defence partnership and cooperation that would drive on the one hand the prosperity in the continent of Africa and on the other the influence of India on the international scene.

The records show and this article has also acknowledged that India is currently actively participating in a number of defence cooperation arrangements with countries that include those in Africa. In this regard, the Indian Navy is said to have developed close ties with countries such as the US, United Kingdom, France, Singapore, Vietnam and Japan. For a robust Africa–India defence cooperation arrangement, however, India needs to seriously consider an extension of its navy’s relationship and engagement with those of the countries of the other maritime domains of Africa, especially that of the GoG. The geostrategic significance of the GoG for Africa and India cannot be gainsaid particularly in the light of the former’s increasing move towards actualising the 2050 African Integrated Maritime Strategy, AIMS. Given its historic ties with Africa, India is at a vantage position to leverage on one of AIMS strategic objectives: the establishment of the Combined Exclusive Maritime Zone of Africa, CEMZA.

## NOTES

1. Sunjoy Joshi, Director’s Note in Abhijnan Rej and Tanoubi Ngangom (eds), *Common Futures, India and Africa in Partnership*, Observer Research Foundation, 2015.

2. Global South basically connotes the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of the collection of terms, including third world and Periphery, that identifies regions that are not part of Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income are often politically or culturally excluded. Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell (2012), *The Global South*, University of Sidney, Australia. The idea was driven firmly by Marxist Antonio Gramsci whose essay 'The Southern Question' began with the idea that southern Italy had, in actual sense been colonized by capitalists from northern Italy. Gramsci brought to the fore the difficulties southern peasants and northern workers faced in trying to build an alliance with one another. In Italian social thought, most later treatments of the North–South differential responded only to the variations in economic development.
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9. While the tentacles of ISIS have reached Bangladesh and Maldives, Mauritius, too, is seeing increased levels of fundamentalist elements. See <http://www.asiantribune.com/node/87114> for more details.
10. About 24 tonnes of drugs, valued at US\$ 190 million, are smuggled annually from the East African coast, all along Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Kenya and Tanzania. See Vijay Sakhuja, 'Drug Smuggling across the Indian Ocean: Impact of Increasing Interceptions', IPCS, 11 September 2014, available at <http://www.ipcs.org/article/terrorism/drug-smuggling-across-the-indian-ocean-impact-of-increasinginterceptions-4654.html>.
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19. Notwithstanding the burgeoning definitions of piracy and the dynamics around the threats that it poses, this article adopts an all-encompassing definition of piracy to include riverine criminality, coastal or low reach piracy and deep-water piracy. It is taken to include all illegal acts of violence and criminality conducted against persons, boats and vessels on the creeks, rivers, coastal waters and the high seas.
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