

AFRICA DIGEST

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From Dakar to Lagos: Indian Navy's Strategic Engagement in Africa

The Indian Navy has been actively strengthening its maritime partnerships across Africa through strategic port visits, joint exercises, and hydrographic surveys. In pursuit of this effort, [INS Tushil](#), India's latest guided missile stealth frigate, visited the port of Dakar in Senegal on 3 January 2025 to strengthen India-Senegal defence ties and explore new avenues of naval cooperation. The visit featured a Subject Matter Expert Exchange (SMEE) program, which facilitated training and knowledge-sharing between the two navies. A joint Yoga session with Senegalese participants added a cultural dimension to the engagement, reinforcing people-to-people ties. The visit concluded with a [Passage Exercise](#) (PASSEX) and a joint patrol with the Senegalese Navy, demonstrating both nations' commitment to enhancing regional security and operational interoperability.

Following its successful deployment in Senegal, INS Tushil continued its journey to [Lagos, Nigeria](#), arriving on 12 January 2025. The visit reaffirmed the growing maritime cooperation between India and Nigeria, particularly in the strategically important Gulf of Guinea. The engagement included professional interactions such as a tabletop exercise and collaborative training activities, allowing both navies to share best practices and strengthen operational synergy.

Beyond military cooperation, the visit also emphasised humanitarian and cultural ties. A medical camp, organised in collaboration with the Indian Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Importers of Nigeria (IPMIN), provided essential healthcare services to local communities, showcasing India's commitment to human security.

Social and cultural engagements further enriched the visit. A deck reception for Nigerian Navy officials, diplomats, the Indian diaspora and an open-ship event was organised which allowed visitors to explore Tushil's advanced capabilities.

Additionally, the Indian Navy also strengthened its maritime security cooperation with Mauritius through an extensive hydrographic survey conducted by [INS Sarvekshak](#). Covering over 25,000 square nautical miles, the survey is a crucial step in maritime infrastructure development and regional security planning. This initiative aligns with India's broader maritime outreach and reflects its commitment to supporting Mauritius in bolstering its maritime domain awareness. The initiative highlights India's role as a reliable maritime partner, particularly in the context of its hydrographic assistance to friendly nations.

Under the SAGAR framework, the [Indian Navy](#) has steadily expanded its hydrographic cooperation, covering over 89,000 sq. km. and producing 96 nautical charts over the past five years. Mauritius, as a key partner in India's maritime security architecture, plays a vital role in regional monitoring and surveillance. The island nation hosts radar centres that contribute to India's coastal security network and operates Indian-built Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH)-MkIII and Dornier Do-228 aircraft, further strengthening bilateral defence ties.

India's increasing naval engagements with Africa reflect a broader shift in its maritime strategy, emphasising security partnerships, defence collaboration, and regional stability. By strengthening naval cooperation with Senegal, Nigeria,

Mauritius, and other African nations, India is not only bolstering its presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond but also actively addressing emerging maritime security challenges, including piracy, illegal fishing, and trafficking. These efforts align with India's long-term vision of a free, open, and rules-based maritime order, positioning it as a responsible and strategic maritime partner in African waters.

Strategic Realignment in West Africa

The recent withdrawal of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) marks a turning point in regional politics, altering the balance of power and cooperation in West Africa. ECOWAS has long been a pillar of regional integration, facilitating trade, political cooperation, and security coordination among its member states. However, the unconstitutional military takeovers in Mali (2020), Burkina Faso (2022), and Niger (2023) created deep frictions between the bloc and these three erstwhile member-states. In response to the coups, ECOWAS imposed sanctions and even threatened military intervention to restore democratic rule. These measures were met with resistance, with the juntas accusing ECOWAS of acting under Western influence rather than prioritising the needs of the Sahel region.

The tensions culminated in the formal exit of the three states on [January 29, 2024](#), and the formation of the Alliance of Sahel States (AES), a new regional bloc seeking to establish alternative frameworks for governance, security, and economic cooperation. One of the defining features of the AES is its emphasis on military collaboration. The security crisis in the

Sahel, fuelled by Islamist insurgencies linked to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State has worsened in recent years resulting in the displacement of millions and undermining state authority. Prior to their withdrawal, the three countries relied on ECOWAS and Western partners, particularly France, for counterterrorism support. However, the juntas increasingly turned to Russia for military aid, seeking arms and paramilitary assistance to combat Islamist insurgents. The AES now plans to deploy a 5,000-strong [joint military force](#) equipped with air assets and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. While this initiative underscores a commitment to self-sufficiency, questions remain about its capacity to counter well-entrenched militant groups effectively.

The [economic](#) implications of leaving ECOWAS are equally significant. Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso are landlocked nations who are heavily reliant on trade with coastal West African states. Membership in ECOWAS previously granted them tariff-free trade, financial assistance, and access to a broader regional market. Their departure raises concerns about potential disruptions to trade flows, increased transaction costs, and economic isolation. However, despite their exit, they remain part of the [West African Economic and Monetary Union](#) (WAEMU), ensuring continued use of the CFA franc and access to regional credit markets. Efforts are also underway to establish alternative trade routes, with Togo's port in Lomé emerging as a key transit hub and Morocco offering a potential Atlantic gateway. These developments suggest that while the AES seeks greater sovereignty, its economic survival will still depend on strategic partnerships with neighbouring states.

The formation of AES also raises broader concerns about the future of regional integration in West Africa. Despite numerous challenges, the ECOWAS has played a crucial role in maintaining political stability and fostering economic cooperation. The departure of three member states reduces its population by 76 million and significantly diminishes its geographical reach. While ECOWAS has extended a six-month grace period for reconsideration, the AES leadership has firmly stated that their departure is irreversible. This divide reflects a growing ideological rift in the region, with ECOWAS advocating for democratic governance and multilateral cooperation, while AES prioritises sovereignty and military-led stability.

The consequences of this split extend beyond economic and political realignment. West Africa's security landscape now faces increased fragmentation, complicating counterterrorism efforts that previously relied on regional coordination. ECOWAS had provided military and logistical support to its members in the fight against jihadist insurgencies, but with the Sahelian states now operating outside its framework, security cooperation is likely to become more complex. The AES will need to navigate strained diplomatic relations, particularly with ECOWAS member states such as [Benin and Côte d'Ivoire](#), which have expressed concerns over the security implications of the break.

Despite the challenges, the AES leadership remains determined to forge a new path. Plans for a shared [biometric passport](#) and a joint parliamentary framework signal an ambition to institutionalise the alliance beyond military cooperation. However,

questions remain about the bloc's ability to establish functional governance structures and sustain long-term economic growth. The AES represents a bold experiment in regional autonomy, but its success will depend on its capacity to address the economic and security challenges that led to its formation in the first place.

Ethiopia and Somalia Seek to Overcome Diplomatic Fallout

The [visit](#) by Somali President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud to Addis Ababa on 11 January 2025, marked a significant shift in Ethiopia-Somalia relations. Tensions between the two nations had escalated to a breaking point after Ethiopia signed a controversial memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Somaliland, granting it port access in exchange for potential recognition of Somaliland's independence. Somalia viewed this as a violation of its sovereignty and responded by severing diplomatic ties and threatening to expel Ethiopian troops from the African Union-led peacekeeping mission. However, in a surprising turn, both countries have now agreed to restore full diplomatic representation in their respective capitals, signalling an attempt to move past their bitter dispute.

At the heart of the crisis was Ethiopia's decision to bypass Mogadishu and negotiate directly with Somaliland, which has functioned autonomously since 1991 but remains unrecognised by the international community. The [MoU](#) not only granted Ethiopia access to Somaliland's coastline but also included plans to establish a naval base, raising fears in Somalia that Ethiopia was attempting to assert territorial control. This provoked strong reactions, with Somalia threatening

military action and accusing Ethiopia of undermining regional stability. The agreement also jeopardised Ethiopia's military presence in Somalia, where its troops have played a crucial role in counterterrorism operations against al-Shabaab. With Somalia initially announcing plans to expel Ethiopian forces, there were growing concerns that such a move could create a security vacuum that would benefit the terrorist group.

The recent rapprochement appears to have de-escalated immediate tensions, with Somalia reconsidering its stance on Ethiopian troop deployments. While Ethiopia has not officially revoked the MoU, its implementation seems uncertain, particularly as Somaliland's new leadership appears less committed to the deal than its predecessor. Analysts suggest that the controversy surrounding the agreement may have made it politically costly for Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to pursue at this time. However, the underlying issues of Ethiopia's quest for sea access and Somalia's territorial integrity remain unresolved, meaning that tensions could resurface in the future.

The diplomatic breakthrough was largely facilitated by [Turkish mediation](#). Ankara has built strong economic and military ties with both Ethiopia and Somalia, giving it leverage to bring the two sides to the negotiating table. The talks resulted in the Ankara Declaration, where both nations pledged to resolve their disputes through dialogue. This reflects Turkey's growing influence in the Horn of Africa, where it has emerged as a key player in regional stability efforts.

Beyond Ethiopia and Somalia, the rapprochement must be seen in the broader

context of regional power struggles. During its fallout with Ethiopia, Somalia [strengthened](#) its ties with Egypt and Eritrea both of whom have tense relations with Addis Ababa. Egypt, which remains locked in a dispute with Ethiopia over the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD), began supplying arms to Somalia, and in October 2024, Mogadishu joined a tripartite alliance with Cairo and Asmara. Ethiopia responded by warning that it could support armed actors hostile to Somalia, raising fears of wider regional instability. Meanwhile, Egypt has also voiced opposition to any foreign naval presence in the Red Sea, directly challenging Ethiopia's maritime ambitions.

While the current thaw in Ethiopia-Somalia relations is a positive step, deep-seated tensions persist. The immediate risk of military confrontation has subsided, but the long-term challenges of territorial disputes, security cooperation, and regional rivalries remain. The rapprochement offers a temporary reset, but sustained diplomatic engagement will be crucial to ensuring lasting stability in the Horn of Africa.

Wang Yi's Africa Visit: Deepening China-Africa Cooperation

China's Foreign Minister, [Wang Yi](#), recently concluded his annual Africa tour, a tradition spanning over 30 years. He reaffirmed China's commitment to Africa during his visit to Namibia, Congo (Brazzaville), Chad, and Nigeria. His discussions focused on advancing the outcomes of the 2024 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

The selection of these four nations is strategic, reflecting a combination of economic, geopolitical, and diplomatic

considerations. Namibia is home to vast uranium reserves, a crucial resource for China's energy ambitions. Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and a key oil exporter, represents a critical market and a pivotal geopolitical partner. Chad, positioned in the unstable Sahel region, is an important player amid the declining influence of France in the area, offering China an opportunity to deepen security cooperation and expand its footprint. The Republic of Congo, as the co-chair of FOCAC, plays a crucial role in shaping China-Africa cooperation, making it a logical stop for Wang Yi.

During his Africa tour, Wang Yi met with key leaders, including Namibia's outgoing President Hage Geingob and President-elect Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, as well as President Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Republic of Congo. In Chad, he held talks with President Mahamat Déby, and in Nigeria, he engaged with President Bola Tinubu. The discussions primarily revolved around the implementation of FOCAC's action plan and the strengthening of China-Africa relations across multiple sectors.

Wang Yi emphasised China's willingness to work closely with African nations on modernisation initiatives, as proposed by President Xi Jinping. Among these initiatives are zero tariffs on specific African exports, enhanced trade cooperation, and climate change collaboration. China reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Africa through green development initiatives, clean energy projects, food security programs, poverty alleviation measures, and capacity building.

A key aspect of Wang Yi's discussions was China's support for Africa in addressing regional security concerns and

strengthening global governance institutions. He reiterated China's opposition to external interference in African internal affairs and emphasised China's backing of Africa's push for United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reforms. These discussions reflect China's broader strategy of positioning itself as a key partner in Africa's political and security landscape.

China has been the leading investor in Africa's infrastructure sector, supporting the construction of roads, bridges, railways, and ports. Wang Yi reaffirmed China's commitment to advancing Africa's industrialisation, citing ongoing investments in manufacturing, energy, and transportation. The discussions also emphasised the importance of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) and how China can play a role in its successful implementation.

As the current co-chair of FOCAC, the [Republic of Congo](#) plays a crucial role in shaping the next phase of China-Africa relations. Wang Yi and his Congolese counterparts discussed the roadmap for implementing the FOCAC partnership action plan (2025-2027), particularly focusing on industrialisation, energy, and infrastructure development. With Namibia undergoing a leadership transition, China reaffirmed its commitment to supporting the country's economic transformation. Wang Yi emphasised the need to harness Namibia's resource wealth for sustainable development, pledging investments in renewable energy and industrial projects.

Located in the Sahel region, [Chad](#) faces significant security challenges. Discussions with Chadian leadership centered on security cooperation, counterterrorism, and

stability in the region. China pledged logistical and intelligence-sharing support to help Chad address its security concerns. As Africa's largest economy and a major oil producer, [Nigeria](#) is a key partner for China. Wang Yi highlighted China's interest in supporting Nigeria's infrastructure development, particularly in transportation and energy. He reiterated China's stance on promoting "African solutions to African problems," emphasising cooperation in security, modernisation, and economic transformation.

Looking ahead, the next phase of China-Africa cooperation will focus on implementing the FOCAC action plan and advancing key projects in infrastructure, energy, and industrialisation. The [African Continental Free Trade Area](#) (AfCFTA) is expected to play a significant role in shaping trade relations, with China providing critical support to enhance Africa's production and trade capacities. Additionally, climate change remains a central theme, with China committing to increasing investment in green energy projects. The China-Africa Solar Belt initiative, announced during the 2024 FOCAC Summit, will be a crucial component of Africa's energy transition efforts.

Wang Yi's 2025 Africa tour reaffirmed China's longstanding commitment to the continent, highlighting areas of mutual interest in trade, security, governance, and development. As global dynamics shift, Africa's strategic importance in China's foreign policy will continue to grow, shaping the trajectory of China-Africa relations in the years to come.

Goma Under Siege: The M23 Offensive and Regional Implications

The eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is once again at the epicentre of intense conflict as the M23 rebel group, allegedly backed by Rwandan forces, continues its rapid offensive towards Goma. The situation has escalated dramatically since the [breakdown](#) of peace talks, leading to a humanitarian crisis and concerns of a broader regional war.

The clashes erupted between the DRC army and M23 fighters on the outskirts of Goma, [prompting](#) the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to issue urgent warnings for their citizens to leave while borders and airports remained open. The United Nations mission in DRC (MONUSCO) [confirmed](#) that its peacekeeping forces had engaged in active combat against the advancing M23 rebels. Heavy artillery fire and bombardments have displaced over [500,000](#) people since the start of the year, exacerbating an already dire humanitarian situation.

In a further escalation, the DRC government ordered the [withdrawal](#) of its diplomats from Rwanda, accusing Kigali of directly supporting M23's military offensive. General Sylvain Ekenge, the Congolese army spokesperson, stated that Rwanda was determined to capture Goma, a city of over a million people and a crucial hub in the mineral-rich North Kivu province. Amid the growing crisis, South Africa, Malawi, and Uruguay confirmed the [deaths](#) of 13 peacekeepers deployed in the region, underscoring the gravity of the conflict.

Fierce fighting continued west of Goma near the town of Sake, with MONUSCO's Quick Reaction Forces launching counter-offensives against M23 positions. The South African National Defence Force (SANDF), deployed under the Southern African Development Community (SADC) mission, suffered significant casualties, losing at least nine troops. Meanwhile, the European Union and the African Union joined France and the United States in condemning the violence and urging Rwanda to withdraw its forces from Congolese territory.

The situation took a dramatic turn when M23 fighters, reinforced by an estimated 3,000-4,000 [Rwandan troops](#), breached Goma's defenses. Explosions and gunfire echoed through the city as Congolese forces struggled to maintain control. The UN began evacuating non-essential personnel, while European embassies urged their citizens to leave immediately. Reports emerged of Congolese military units surrendering to MONUSCO peacekeepers, further highlighting the deteriorating situation.

A mass prison break in [Goma](#) saw approximately 3,000 inmates escape amid the chaos, raising fears of lawlessness. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported over 370 wounded individuals being treated in local hospitals, many of them civilians, including women and children. The first cases of cholera were confirmed in displacement camps, signalling an impending health crisis.

The fate of Goma remains uncertain. The humanitarian toll continues to rise, and the risk of a full-scale [regional war](#) looms large.

With international mediation efforts stalling, the conflict threatens to plunge the Great Lakes region into deeper instability. The unfolding events will determine whether diplomatic engagement can prevent further devastation or if the crisis will spiral into prolonged violence.