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# The Evolution of India-Africa Defense Cooperation: Opportunities, Challenges, and Future Prospects

*“Rooted in historical ties and driven by mutual interests, the strategic partnership between India and African nations holds significant promise for enhancing regional security and fostering economic development.”*



South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile, center left, welcomes Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi upon his arrival ahead of the 15th BRICS summit on Aug. 22, 2023, in Pretoria, South Africa. (Jacoline Schoonees / DIRCO / Handout / Anadolu Agency via Getty Images)

The evolving relationship between India and Africa in the realm of defense cooperation has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Rooted in historical ties and driven by mutual interests, the strategic partnership between India and African nations holds significant promise for enhancing regional security and fostering economic development. This research analysis delves into the opportunities, challenges, and prospects of India-Africa defense cooperation. By examining the economic, security, and diplomatic dimensions of this partnership, the analysis seeks to elucidate the factors shaping the evolution of defense relations between India and Africa. Through critical evaluation and empirical examples, this study aims to provide insights into the potential avenues for collaboration and the obstacles that must be navigated to realize the full potential of this burgeoning partnership.

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## Opportunities for Enhanced Defense Cooperation

Opportunities for enhanced defense cooperation between India and Africa stem from a confluence of factors, including economic development, shared security concerns, and diplomatic engagement.<sup>1</sup> One significant avenue for collaboration lies in the economic sphere. India's burgeoning economy and Africa's vast economic potential present fertile ground for mutual defense collaboration. For instance, India's defense industry, renowned for its prowess in manufacturing and technology, can partner with African countries to establish joint ventures in defense production.<sup>2</sup> This not only fosters technology transfer but also contributes to skill development and job creation, thereby bolstering economic growth in both regions. A prime example of such collaboration is India's assistance in setting up the Mahindra Land Systems manufacturing plant in South Africa, which produces armored vehicles for both domestic and export markets.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, both India and Africa face a myriad of shared security challenges, ranging from terrorism and piracy to maritime security threats.<sup>4</sup> These common threats provide a compelling rationale for cooperation in defense and security domains. Through intelligence-sharing mechanisms, joint training programs, and coordinated counter-terrorism operations, India and African nations can effectively combat transnational security threats.<sup>5</sup> The Indian Navy's anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, conducted in collaboration with African navies and international partners, exemplify the potential for synergistic efforts to safeguard maritime security and ensure safe passage for global trade. Moreover, India's provision of training and capacity-building assistance to African peacekeeping forces underscores its commitment to enhancing Africa's security capabilities and promoting regional stability.<sup>6</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> Sharapova, Aleksandra V. "India: Focus Africa?" Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. Asian and African Studies 14, no. 2 (2022): 366–80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21638/spbu13.2022.213>

<sup>2</sup> Bragina, E. A. "India – Africa: Trade and Investments in the XXI Century." Outlines of global transformations: politics, economics, law 11, no. 5 (December 3, 2018): 182–99. <http://dx.doi.org/10.23932/2542-0240-2018-11-5-182-199>.

<sup>3</sup> Hofmeyr, Isabel. South Africa & India: Shaping the global South. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Bhatia, Rajiv. "Bilateral aspects." In India–Africa Relations, 125–61. London: Routledge India, 2021. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003044550-8>.

<sup>5</sup> Kukreja, Veena. "India in the Emergent Multipolar World Order: Dynamics and Strategic Challenges." India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs 76, no. 1 (March 2020): 8–23. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0974928419901187>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

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Diplomatic engagement serves as another catalyst for deepening defense ties between India and Africa. India's "Act East" policy and Africa's Agenda 2063 framework provide strategic frameworks for fostering closer political, economic, and security relations.<sup>7</sup> Through bilateral visits, high-level meetings, and participation in multilateral forums such as the India-Africa Forum Summit, both sides have reiterated their commitment to strengthening defense cooperation. For instance, India's defense cooperation with countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia has been bolstered through agreements on defense training, equipment supply, and joint military exercises. Similarly, India's participation in peacekeeping missions in Africa, under the auspices of the United Nations, showcases its active engagement in promoting peace and security on the continent.<sup>8</sup>

The opportunities for enhanced defense cooperation between India and Africa are manifold, driven by economic imperatives, shared security interests, and diplomatic endeavors. By leveraging their respective strengths and synergizing efforts, both regions stand to benefit from deeper defense collaboration. However, realizing these opportunities necessitates concerted efforts to overcome challenges such as bureaucratic hurdles, resource constraints, and geopolitical dynamics. Nonetheless, the trajectory of India-Africa defense relations remains promising, underscored by concrete examples of cooperation and a shared commitment to advancing mutual interests in the realms of security and defense.



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## Challenges to Deepening Defense Cooperation

Challenges to deepening defense cooperation between India and Africa encompass a range of complexities, from institutional constraints to resource limitations and geopolitical dynamics.<sup>9</sup> Bureaucratic hurdles within both Indian and African defense establishments pose a significant impediment to the effective implementation of joint initiatives and the signing of defense agreements. Administrative processes, red tape, and divergent regulatory frameworks often hinder the swift execution of collaborative projects, leading to delays and inefficiencies. For instance, despite the mutual desire for closer defense ties, the cumbersome bureaucratic procedures in some

<sup>7</sup> Nzomo, Maria. "Foreign Policy and Diplomacy in India–East African Relations." *Insight on Africa* 6, no. 2 (July 2014): 89–111. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0975087814535427>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Louw, Abraham Johannes Petrus. "The Indian Ocean Rim: what kind of region is in the making?" Thesis, Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2003. <http://hdl.handle.net/10019.1/53649>

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African countries have delayed the finalization of defense cooperation agreements with India, stalling progress in key areas such as military training and technology transfer.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, resource constraints present a formidable challenge to the expansion of defense cooperation between India and Africa.<sup>11</sup> Both regions grapple with limited financial resources and competing domestic priorities, which constrain investments in defense infrastructure, technology acquisition, and military modernization efforts. African nations, in particular, face budgetary constraints that often impede their ability to procure advanced defense equipment and invest in capacity-building initiatives. This reliance on external assistance for military capabilities can complicate efforts to deepen defense cooperation, as it necessitates strategic alignment of interests and commitments from both sides<sup>12</sup>. Despite India's willingness to extend lines of credit and provide defense assistance to African partners, the magnitude of resource requirements often outstrips available funding, limiting the scope of collaborative endeavors.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, geopolitical dynamics add another layer of complexity to the challenge of deepening defense cooperation between India and Africa.<sup>14</sup> India's competition with China for influence in Africa, as well as historical ties between African nations and other major powers, may complicate efforts to forge exclusive defense partnerships and alliances. The diverse array of security partnerships pursued by African countries, ranging from traditional allies to emerging powers, underscores the complexity of navigating geopolitical dynamics in the region. For instance, while India seeks to strengthen its strategic footprint in Africa through defense cooperation, it must navigate existing defense relationships between African nations and other actors, such as the United States, Russia, and China, which may have divergent interests and priorities.<sup>15</sup>

The challenges to deepening defense cooperation between India and Africa underscore the multifaceted nature of the relationship and the complexities inherent in forging closer ties in the defense realm. Overcoming bureaucratic hurdles, addressing resource constraints, and navigating geopolitical dynamics will require concerted efforts and strategic coordination between stakeholders on both sides. Nonetheless, with a shared commitment to advancing mutual interests in security and defense, India and Africa can surmount these challenges and forge a stronger partnership that contributes to regional stability and prosperity.



<sup>10</sup> Saran, Shyam. *India and Africa: Development partnership*. New Delhi: Research and Information System for Developing Countries, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Yadav, S. N. *India-South Africa relations: Political, economic, and strategic perspectives*. New Delhi: Global Vision Pub. House, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Mawdsley, Emma, and Gerard McCann. *India in Africa: Changing geographies of power*. Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Biswas, Aparajita. *India-Africa enduring partnership: Emerging areas of cooperation*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2013.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*