



Importance of Africa in Indo-Pacific Strategy

This article is based on [“Reimagining India and Africa”](#) that appeared in Indian Express on 2 July 2019. It talks about the need for India to integrate Africa into its Indo-Pacific policy.

Geographically, Indo-Pacific refers to the Indian and the Pacific Oceans between the east coast of Africa and the American west coast and their several littoral countries. Though the term Indo-pacific has been in global strategic writings and speeches from the start of the 21st century but envisions of Indo-pacific by US President Trump (to check the rise of China) at the 2017 APEC Summit in Vietnam has changed geopolitical contours of the region.

Since then every major power in the Indo-pacific region has formulated their versions of Indo-pacific. For example, recently Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has adopted the ‘ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific’ after more than a year of negotiations. But the strategy for Indo-Pacific neglects the importance of Africa and India is no exception to this fallacy.

What is the importance of Africa in the Indo-Pacific equation especially for India

- Envision of Indo-pacific seemed to have elevated India to a position of prominence in the region which can be reflected by:
 - **Strategic convergence with the US** that would help to contain China’s dominance.
 - In pursuance to the above aim, India appeared to be a **member of Quad** (strategic talks and military exercises between the US, Japan, Australia and India)
 - But India must not forget Africa is the route through which India's global power aspirations pass.
- Importance of Africa for India can be seen in the following dimensions:
 - Africa has turned from "**The Hopeless Continent**" to "**A Hopeful Continent**" given its demography, resources, market etc.
 - Also, India and Africa share historical ties, the 1955 Bandung Conference was not just about Asia or non-alignment but promoting Afro-Asian solidarity.
 - Africa assumes strategic importance for India in relation to:
 - **Geopolitical interest:** South-South cooperation, UNSC reforms, Competition with China, Cooperation in global issues such as climate change and WTO reforms.
 - **Geo-economic interest:** Energy security - Oil (Nigeria), the supply of Uranium (South Africa), huge mineral resources of Africa, growing population of Africa provides for new opportunities for goods and services exports from India.
 - **Geostrategic interest:** Maritime security - East coast countries are important for peace and prosperity of the Indian Ocean region, trade relations across and beyond Africa and interests of Indian diaspora in Africa.
 - Since the rise of Asia and Africa, these continents are reconstituting the geographies of the eastern hemisphere and breaking down the artificial mental maps that emerged in the 20th century. Thus, India must recognise the growing importance of Africa for the security and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific.
 - However, there are several issues that impede India's engagement with Africa

The New African Scramble

- Africa is witnessing a phenomenon called the **“New Scramble for Africa”**.
 - If Europe and North America dominated Africa’s economic relationship in the past, China, India, Japan, South Korea and the ASEAN share the geopolitical space today with the US and EU. China, Japan, Korea and India are also major investors in Africa as well as providers of development assistance
 - China’s maritime silk road is about connecting China’s eastern seaboard with the Indian Ocean littoral.
 - China is involved in the development of 47 ports in sub-Saharan Africa.
 - China’s expanding defence and security engagement in Africa. Over the last few years, China has emerged as the largest major arms supplier to Sub-Saharan Africa.
 - The US, which was focused on terrorism and other non-military threats after 9/11, is paying attention to Africa’s new geopolitics.
 - Russia, which seemed to turn its back on Africa after the collapse of the Soviet Union, is now returning with some vigour.
 - Also, many regional actors like Iran, UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey are taking a growing interest in African security affairs.
- India lacks diplomatic presence in Africa as India has an embassy only in 29 out of 54 African countries.
- A lot of African countries are suffering from political instability.
- Thus pan African strategy is not working as Africa is not homogenous
- Also, there is a saying that - "India promises and China delivers". India's implementation and delivery have been flawed.

Way Forward

- India should focus on its comparative advantages like services sector, pharma and private sector relationship.
- India has leverage over China as the latter's investments are perceived as neocolonial whereas India is engaged in partnership based on mutual benefit and capacity building
- Africa is too big for both India and China, so they both must cooperate and wherever there is competition it must be constructive.
- India elevated the engagement with Africa by hosting a summit in Delhi for all the African leaders, unveiling sustained high-level political contact, expanding India’s diplomatic footprint, strengthening economic engagement and boosting military diplomacy.
- But the scale and speed of Africa’s current transformation need to be a priority on India's strategic map.

Indian foreign policy has always envisaged a rules-based order anchored upon international law, openness, transparency, inclusivity and commitment to advancing economic engagement in the region. In this regard India can focus on four areas of cooperation with Africa i.e. maritime cooperation; connectivity; UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030; and economic development.

Drishti input:

Indi’s Indo-pacific strategy reflects the neglect of strategically important Africa. Comment.