

India's Policy towards African Countries: An assessment of Narendra Modi Government

Dr Vijay Kumar Badetia

Assistant Professor,
Department of Political Science,
Janki Devi Memorial College,
University of Delhi

In October 2015, just over a year after Narendra Modi became Prime Minister, the third India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS) was held in New Delhi. Situating India–Africa relations within the context of India's increasing geopolitical calculations, which envision the country's strategic domain extending from the Suez Canal to the Pacific, is expected to have a sizable impact on the relationship. Modi's strong foreign policy has been painstakingly developed in order to appeal to both neighbours and global strategic actors. Modi's expansive foreign policy includes Africa, as he intends to bolster India's role in this designated geostrategic zone, monitor Chinese and other external actors in the Indian Ocean and Africa, and garner support for India's global aspirations.

As India's foreign policy shifts toward a more geoeconomic focus and Africa prepares to address its economic and political challenges and reclaim a greater role in global debates, the relationship should evolve to emphasise the importance of business opportunities that resonate with African manufacturing and services. Similarly, the relationship has room to strengthen its political and security engagement, both at the IAFS and regional levels, in order to remain relevant in the face of a shifting global power environment. Both parties should commit the institutional resources necessary to achieving the IAFS's objectives.

INTRODUCTION

It was the first time an IAFS summit was held under Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, which took place in New Delhi in October 2015. Since its inception, the International Association for the Framing of Social Science (IAFS) has been dedicated to making links. A series of high-profile international and business engagements around the Indian subcontinent, as well as improved relations with the United States and Japan, marked Modi's first 18 months in office.* According to his government's actions thus far, a more aggressive Indian foreign policy has been implemented, one that is aware of the shifting power balances in the area. As well as increasing awareness of India's worldwide diaspora, it emphasises economic diplomacy through reducing red tape and regulatory impediments to doing business.

Indian geopolitical calculations, which define their strategic zone as stretching from the Suez Canal to the Pacific, are expected to have the most impact on their relationship.† The early focus on South Asian states and high-level encounters with China, the United States, Japan, Australia, and Russia demonstrate that Modi's more muscular foreign policy has been carefully calibrated to involve both neighbours and global strategic powers. To put it another way, Modi's comprehensive foreign policy encompasses Africa, as he works to strengthen India's position in this designated geostrategic zone, keep an eye on Chinese and other external actors in the Indian Ocean and Africa, and gather support for India's global aims.‡ The growing commercial competition between India and China in the Indian Ocean littoral economies has led to the creation of 'soft power balance' projects with African and Indian Ocean nations, including base agreements and navy treaties. In contrast to the previous two summits, which only invited a small number of African governments, India welcomed all African states to the IAFS in October 2015.

The Indian diaspora in Africa, as well as Modi's desire to enhance Indian investment on

*The India–Africa summits take place every three years, with the third summit (originally set for December 2014) being postponed until October 2015 due to the West African Ebola outbreak.

†August 2014, personal conversation with a former top Indian ambassador.

‡'Grand strategy for the first half of the twenty-first century', in *Grand Strategy for India: 2020 and beyond*, by Subrahmanyam K. IDSA (Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses), New Delhi, 2012.

the continent, all point to the possibility of a more comprehensive development relationship that has geopolitical consequences.

Prior to 2014, Indian foreign policy was as follows:

Non-alignment in a global system on the verge of Cold War politics characterised India's conventional post-independence foreign policy. When India gained independence in 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru founded the Non-Aligned Movement, and for the first two decades afterward the country's foreign policy was utopian, portraying national goals as "compatible" with global cooperation and peace.[§] At the time, Nehru warned that India would have to 'plough a lonely furrow.'^{**} According to Subrahmanyam, India's members of the Constituent Assembly vowed in August 1947 to work for world peace rather than their personal glory and advancement.^{††} The Indian-Chinese border conflict of 1962 brought an end to this. Nehru's assassination in 1964 prompted Delhi to renounce its utopian foreign policy and accept "hard realism," as Malone refers to it. To coincide with a shift in Indian foreign policy toward economic rationality, the government of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao began implementing gradualist market-oriented reforms in the economy in 1991. Indians began to see themselves as part of a larger group of nations^{‡‡} "seeking greater power" after "losing their moral uniqueness"^{§§} Under Modi, this trend is gathering momentum.^{***}

According to several critics, India's foreign policy has been lacking direction because of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's United Progressive Alliance government's (UPA) emphasis on strategic autonomy.^{†††} Detractors saw it as a strategy to limit India's cooperation with other countries, most notably the United States, by invoking Beijing's

[§]Extract from Nehru's 4 December 1947 address to India's Constituent Assembly, as recounted in Malone D, *Does the Elephant Dance? Indian Foreign Policy in the Contemporary Period* Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, pp. 48–49.

^{**}*Ibid*

^{††}Subrahmanyam K, *op.cit.*, p.13

^{‡‡}In 2000, Hardgrave and Kochanek described India's non-alignment stance as 'irrelevant, if not useless'. India: Government and Politics in a Developing Nation, 6th edition, R. Hardgrave and S. Kochanek. Harcourt, New York, 2000, p. 417.

^{§§}Malone D, *op. cit.*, p. 52

^{***}*Ibid.*, p. 48.

^{†††}'How Narendra Modi could bring in India's finest foreign policy period yet,' DNA, 15 May 2014.

sensitivities, which was meant to keep Delhi in the middle of Washington and Beijing.⁺⁺⁺

After a lengthy public debate over the contentious nuclear deal with the US, India and the United States signed a ten-year defence pact. Both countries' unspoken understanding created the framework for future cooperation, which paralleled the Cold War-era convergence of interests between Delhi and Moscow. With the signing of development and investment agreements with the Indian government, Japan has also deepened its ties with the Indian government.

Even as it emerged that Indian politicians and think tanks were more concerned about the country's burgeoning economic links with the area, India's stoic approach to China was coming under increasing pressure from both domestic and foreign governments and organisations. In order to strengthen its energy security and defend its commercial interests in the Persian Gulf, Horn of Africa, and elsewhere, China has deliberately built naval stations throughout the Indian Ocean's coast. A long-held Indian foreign policy perspective, dating back to Nehru's time, was that the Indian Ocean region was effectively (though never fully realised) a region of influence.^{§§§} As a result, scholars in India believe that India is entering a "Great Game^{****} of the 21st century, centred on energy," and that in order to avoid becoming "a junior partner to a burgeoning Chinese behemoth,"⁺⁺⁺⁺ new thinking and policy realignments are required. An aggressive Indian foreign policy in this atmosphere is being tested in India-Africa ties that have been resurrected in the last decade of robust economic growth in the region.

Concept for Foreign Policy in Modi's Regime

After Modi's May 2014 election victory, India has occasionally engaged in foreign policy outreach to its neighbours and the international community. As the leader of the Hindu nationalist BharatiyaJanata Party, Modi earned a large majority in India's lower chamber,

⁺⁺⁺MohanCR, 'Strategicautonomy', *IndianExpress*, 15November2013.

^{§§§}J. Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru's Selected Works, volume 3, series 2. 133, cited in Brewster D, *China and India at Sea: A Contest for Status and Legitimacy in the Indian Ocean*, Australia-India Institute, Australian National University, September 2015, p. 13.

^{****}B. Chellaney, 'China in Asia: Managing the Ascendancy of an Authoritarian Power with Unbridled Ambitions', in S. Kondapalli and E. Mifune (eds.), *China and Its Neighbors*. Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2010, p. 34.

⁺⁺⁺⁺Protracted Conflict: Sino-India Rivalry in the Twentieth Century, Garver J. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 2001, p. 389

the Lok Sabha (BJP). From 1998 until 2004, the BJP led a national coalition government. The economic reforms he promised would end the country's years of stagnation helped him win over young, urban, and educated supporters, as well as Christian nationalists.

India has been dubbed a "swing state"^{††††} by the United States, China, and Japan as geostrategic concerns on the Asian mainland rise. Meanwhile, Modi has emphasised India's closeness in order to "break the invisible barrier."^{§§§§} In contrast to his predecessors' 'Looking East,' Modi has dubbed this 'Acting East,' which he believes has failed to accomplish meaningful achievements in East Asia since its 1992 launch.

The Modi administration's first distinguishing feature was its focus on India's underserved regional neighbours, aside from the country's persistent security worries. For instance, Modi was the first Indian prime minister to visit Nepal in 17 years. There have been large business delegations accompanying each of his international tours, emphasising the need to overcome issues like those with Bangladesh in order to lay the groundwork for further economic cooperation between neighbours.^{*****} Excursions to the Seychelles, Mauritius, and Sri Lanka in March 2015 broadened the scope of the primary research to include the entire Indian Ocean region. Modi also visited Fiji, an island nation in the South Pacific with a sizable Indian community.

It is widely believed that Modi's emphasis on reaching out to India's diaspora marks a turning point for Indian foreign policy. The BJP's Hindutva doctrine (the party's dominant strain of Hindu nationalism), in which Modi is considered to be pushing India's Hindu identity at the expense of secularism and the country's acceptance of other ethnic and religious groups, is obviously present in his outreach.^{††††} There are 2.7 million Indians

^{††††}SubrahmanyamK, *op. cit.*, p.21.

^{§§§§}August 2014, New Delhi, personal conversation with a retired senior Indian official

^{*****}'What we learned from NarendraModi's Bangladesh tour', LiveMint, 9 June 2015,

<http://www.livemint.com/Politics/JbGxtRjzQSjUDCgY7OLGQJ/What-we-learned-from-Narendra-Modis-Bangladesh-visit>, accessed 15 September 2015.

^{†††††}S. Ganguly, Hindu Nationalism and the BharatiyaJanata Party's Foreign Policy, Transatlantic Academy, 2014–15 Paper Series, vol. 2, 2015.

living in Africa,^{*****} which means that locations where there has been an Indian presence in Africa for a long time may receive particular attention. Even rural Indians today have close relatives working and living abroad, thus this focus on the diaspora speaks to an Indian domestic base. By doing so, the diaspora's bonds with India are strengthened and revitalised. Immigration from the Indian subcontinent has resulted in strong ties with some African countries. Even though South African Indians have a long history stretching back to the anti-apartheid movement, many have chosen to identify as black South African rather than Indian, making the country an exception in this regard. Another problem is that the descendants of the original emigrants have lost touch with their ties to India over time.

Indian relations with Central Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral states in general have been steered or revitalised under Modi. The Connect Central Asia Policy was revitalised during his July 2015 trip to Central Asia (which was launched in 2012). Central Asia is a market and a source of potential energy for India. Due to India's tense relations with its neighbours Pakistan and China, as well as the sanctions imposed on Iran, travel to Central Asia has become increasingly difficult. Following the implementation of the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the six world powers, India now has new hinterland connectivity options that do not include Pakistan or China. In geostrategic business endeavours like Iran's Chabahar port construction, political and financial goals are purposefully combined.

Similarly, India's ties to the Indian Ocean Rim and its governing organisation (the Indian Ocean Rim Association, or IORA) are growing stronger. India's Ministry of External Affairs held a commemorative summit in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, in March 2015 to mark 1000 years since King RajendraChola I took the kingdom. Andaman and Nicobar Islands expeditions, as well as an assault on the south-east Asian empire centred on Sumatra in 1030, helped RajendraChola I expand his power to the eastern Indian Ocean coast. The BJP's goal to reconcile the present with an Indian history that is seen as glorious and

^{*****}MEA,*op.cit.*

expansionist in its influence is exemplified by this memorial and its connection to modern Indian Ocean participation. There were no Indian colonies in these locations, according to a senior PM's Office official at the conference. India's desire to be seen positively under the BJP's leadership is reflected in these feelings, even though the historical record is mixed. A peaceful and prosperous Indian Ocean Rim is the goal of Modi's Indian Ocean concept, which he hopes to achieve through a network of integrative and cooperative relationships aimed at securing regional prosperity and security through improved economic and security cooperation.^{§§§§§}

As a result, India aims to become the region's leading network security company. As the "gravitational centre of the Indian Ocean Rim," it claims it has a unique role to play in promoting economic and security cooperation between the region's countries.^{*****} It's also important to avoid portraying the ocean as India's ocean, according to various Indian analysts and officials.^{†††††}

However, India's renewed interest in the Pacific Rim and the Indo-Pacific area stretches back to the Singh administration, notwithstanding the increased activity since the BJP government took office in 2014. While Australia and India played a significant role in reviving IORA, it is an Indian officer who serves as the Secretariat's current director.

Amidst China's growing economic and political clout in the Indian Ocean region, these operations are taking place. With China's massive investment in the construction and rehabilitation of ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka has sparked worldwide attention. In response to China's incursion into the Indian Ocean, India is considering reinstating the Indian Ocean's 'zone of peace' from 1971. (which Sri Lanka suggested at the time but was rejected by India).^{†††††} The Andaman and Nicobar Islands are also being modernised, with airstrips upgraded and fighter units stationed near the Malacca Strait.

^{§§§§§} Sushma Swaraj, Indian Minister of External Affairs, delivered the keynote address at the 'India and the Indian Ocean' conference in Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, on March 20, 2015.

^{*****} RN Ravi, Indian Prime Minister's Office, remarks during the start of the 'India and the Indian Ocean' conference in Bhubaneswar, Odisha State, India, on March 20, 2015.

^{†††††} 'India and the Indian Ocean' conference, Bhubaneswar, Odisha State, India, 20 March 2015.

^{†††††} *The Economic Times*, 'Chinese base in Indian Ocean threatens peace: Ajit Kumar Doval, National Security Adviser', 28 March 2015.

According to some Indian academics, the islands should be developed as a "centre" or "launching pad" for regional power projection. §§§§§§

Secondly, Modi is interested in encouraging Indian internal economic development, as exemplified by his 2014 campaign slogan "Make in India." He calls this economic diplomacy. It has grown into a massive endeavour aimed at facilitating investment, boosting innovation, fostering the development of skills, safeguarding intellectual property, and building industrial infrastructure of world-class. §§§§§§ Manufacturing of automobile and component components is discussed as well as the development of electrical and food processing systems as well as biotechnology.

Foreign and economic policies of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi must accommodate Africa

When it comes to Africa, Modi's foreign policy efforts since becoming prime minister have been disappointing. The different geopolitical and economic landscape in which Modi and his government have prioritised ties has been highlighted by his worldwide visits. The IAFS is just one part of India's broader engagement with Africa. Both India's current and previous governments have stated that Africa is part of India's outer ring of foreign engagement. On the other hand, Modi's more aggressive foreign policy has highlighted this.

Only Mauritius and the Seychelles have been visited by the prime minister since May 2014. He hasn't been to Africa yet. The rekindling of India's connections with the Indian Ocean necessitates both the Seychelles and Mauritius. For example, in Assumption Island, he won agreements for infrastructure development and established a coastal surveillance radar project. As a result, New Delhi is able to place strategic assets in the Indian Ocean for the purposes of gathering intelligence, monitoring, and conducting reconnaissance. To

§§§§§§ D. Kukreja, 'Andaman and Nicobar Islands: A Security Challenge for India,' India Defence Review, 28, 1 January–March 2013, <http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/andaman-and-nicobar-islands-a-security-challenge-for-india/0/>, accessed 24 April 2015.
§§§§§§ See 'MakeinIndia', <http://www.makeinindia.com/>, accessed 15 October 2015.

help the Mauritian Defense Forces better secure their national interests, Modi signed an agreement with Mauritius in the same month.^{††††††††} A warship commissioning ceremony took place at the same time as Modi's visit. In addition to anti-piracy missions, it will also be used for maritime security. ^{††††††††}As a centre for Indian investment in Africa and beyond, Mauritius has a long and mutually beneficial relationship with India. In contrast, there are disagreements over this. In May 2014, Modi and his colleague in Mauritius agreed to renegotiate the double taxation pact. To avoid Indian capital gains tax, India was concerned that Indians were using Mauritius-based firms to "round trip" their investments back to India.

While Modi was in Sri Lanka, he took advantage of the newly elected government's desire to refocus Sri Lanka's foreign policy toward India and China.

For the ninth Joint Ministerial Commission meeting, India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj travelled to South Africa in May 2015. A visit to Tanzania by Swaraj on her March African tour had been postponed; she instead travelled to South Africa and met with President Jacob Zuma there. In November 2014, she returned to Mauritius as the chief guest to commemorate the 180th anniversary of the entrance of Indian enslaved labourers in the island country. On the same day that Mozambique's new president was inaugurated, India's Minister of State for External Affairs General VK Singh attended, and Kalraj Mishra was in Rwanda to inaugurate the India–Africa Vocational Training Center/Incubation Center, which was established with Indian government assistance by the National Small Industries Corporation. Ministerial travels to international events such as the United Nations Environment Program's annual summit in Kenya or Cape Town's annual mining indaba are not included in these excursions.)

As India's global aspirations and geoeconomic imperatives expand, Africa will become increasingly relevant in a wide range of industries. With its considerable UN-sponsored

^{††††††††} Chatterji SK, 'Narendra Modi's active Indian Ocean diplomacy', *The Diplomat*, 23 March 2015.

^{††††††††} Panda A, 'Is the Indian Ocean India's ocean?', *The Diplomat*, April 2015 (digital edition).

peacekeeping effort, the United States can first increase its soft power capabilities. Peacekeeping and humanitarian aid appear to be selfless activities, but governments that supply them reap the benefits in terms of promoting their image abroad and defending their economic interests. India has a long history of participating actively in international peacekeeping missions, as seen by its approximately 4,500 personnel now stationed in Africa. The organization's reputation has been tainted by claims of sexual and financial misbehaviour against Indian employees. §§§§§§§§

It is possible that the rise of extremist groups in Africa and the Middle East may have a direct impact on India's security concerns. Boko Haram in Nigeria and al-Shabaab in the Horn of Africa are only two of the non-state groups battling African countries from west to east in the Sahel region. Many of these countries are in a precarious political position and are unable to deal with the global crisis. An extensive network of bilateral defence cooperation and anti-terrorism activities already exists between many African countries and India. As part of the African Union's Agenda 2063, which aims to promote peace and security, India has a stake in the global counter-terrorism narrative's growth.

Second, India has an interest in maritime security, especially in the Indian Ocean, where the Indian Navy is now engaged in a battle with Somali pirates. While conducting hydrographic studies on the western shore of the ocean, it also helped several countries. Indian geostrategic calculations in the domain of marine security must take into account the interests of African countries.

New hydrocarbon finds on both sides of Africa have raised Africa's geoeconomic prominence as a player capable of enabling India to ensure its energy security. Thirdly. Although India sees the African hydrocarbon trade as incredibly potential, it will require

§§§§§§§§ 'Africa: The Indispensable Continent for India?' Sidhu WPS, Africa in Focus, blog, 3 November 2015,

<http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/africa-in-focus/posts/2015/11/03-africa-indispensable-india-sidhu#>, acc.essed 31 December 2015.

enormous expenditure to develop and utilise these discoveries.^{*****} They also allow it to broaden its energy portfolio beyond reliance on Middle Eastern oil.

"Make in India" is not only a demand to increase manufacturing capacity in India but also a push to increase access to foreign markets. The growing middle class in many African countries makes the region an ideal arena for India's economic diplomacy efforts. In Africa, the continent's arcs of wealth and insecurity intersect, from Nigeria in West Africa to Kenya in East Africa, and the twin crises of Boko Haram and al-Shabaab.

In addition, as Indian companies look to expand globally and invest in less developed areas, such as Africa, the economic expansion taking place in several African countries gives investment opportunities for Indian firms. In June 2015, the Common Market for East and Southern Africa, the East African Community, and SADC established the Tripartite Free Trade Area (TFTA), opening up new possibilities. While the TFTA has its roots in goods trade, Indian enterprises can now invest across Africa thanks to the TFTA.

long-term partnership and engagement with agenda of Africa

International fora are becoming increasingly aware of Africa's distinct identity as a continent (both through continental organisations and the growing weight of individual countries). Instead of focusing simply on internal growth, it wants to engage with external stakeholders in order to broaden and deepen its voice and impact on global debates and activities. External relationships are retooled in this way so that they are more closely aligned with these goals. In three respects, this is critical to India's continental ties to Africa.

In the first place, there's Agenda 2063, a continent-wide plan for Africa's next half-century that was accepted by the continent's leaders last year. Industrialization, manufacturing, the rise of blue and green economies, and the creation of jobs are all part of the plan to revitalise the economy. It is essential that any long-term connection with Africa

^{*****} MEA, *op.cit.*

prioritises mobilising financial resources and providing technical help in order to achieve these goals. "Respect Africa's vision and goals and adequately coordinate their partnerships" are the words of the African Union.^{††††††††} Ten-year implementation periods will be used to achieve ambitious targets and to monitor and evaluate the progress of the 50-year plan.

Second, Africa is rediscovering its maritime industry, with the Africa Integrated Maritime Strategy serving as the most conspicuous example of this (AIMS). A growing awareness of Africa's geopolitical importance in a changing world and the necessity for African states to have greater influence over their geographical territory may be seen in this (including water). In 2012, AIMS was approved by the AU. It assumes that disagreements may be resolved peacefully. With a focus on environmental stewardship, it seeks to mobilise nations around the world to boost the maritime economy. Competitiveness and long-term growth are its primary goals. Landlocked states' fundamental right to access the sea and transit products is supported by AIMS, which supports for a combined exclusive maritime zone and stronger coastal zone control. AIMS's low-hanging fruit is to develop regional centres of excellence in marine safety and security education. There have been some difficulties in getting the necessary funding to achieve its lofty ambitions, however.

India and the African Union are both aware of the critical necessity of maritime safety and security for their respective countries. Combating piracy is a priority, but so is implementing sound maritime resource management, which may help spur the Blue Economy's economic growth. In spite of India's specific interest in the Indian Ocean, it may be beneficial to collaborate with countries on both sides of the continent in this area (and softpower projection). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's aim of a "blue revolution" aligns with the continent's desire for a Blue Economy.

With its emphasis on four key interconnection concerns, PIDA (Program on Infrastructure Development for Africa) is the third project in this series. The \$25 billion transportation

^{††††††††}AU, 'Agenda 2063: The Africa we Want', 2014, p. 9.

program's goal is to link vital production and consumption centres, improve regional and continental commerce, and open up landlocked regions by building new highways and rail lines, all while selecting the best ports and railway hubs. Funding \$500 million for Internet exchange points and land-based fiber-optic infrastructure development is aimed at creating favourable conditions for these projects to be completed. There are plans to develop multipurpose dams and boost Africa's lake and river basin organisations' capabilities to create hydraulic infrastructure in order to better transboundary water management. The \$40 billion energy infrastructure plan prioritises large hydropower dams and energy pools.

PIDA places a higher value on regional connectivity than on connection inside a single country. As a result of its LOCs, India has been able to contribute to the continent's long-term goal of developing economic subregions through supporting regional infrastructure activities.

The conclusions of the third summit contained a slew of initiatives like these. It's critical to figure out how these principles will be implemented and tracked.

Final thoughts: Seminars on "strategic collaboration" with foreign companies are being organised all over Africa. While FOCAC has a wide reach, Iran–Africa, on the other hand, has a rather narrow one. A fundamental obstacle that the AU and its member states must overcome is the inability to coordinate and manage these connections in an effective manner. These institutional restrictions and the importance of good relationship management are demonstrated by the African Union's 2013 decision to suspend new global partnerships. New efforts have been made by the AU to ensure that these links are thoroughly checked out. As a result, the IAFS should include a system for tracking project progress and evaluating the project's success and impact.

As India's foreign policy becomes more geoeconomic in nature and Africa prepares to

India's contacts with Africa have long been dominated by business and trade associations like the Confederation of Indian Industry. The private sector is vital to expanding trade and investment ties, thus this trend should be maintained. At a time when both India and Africa are stepping up their global security and political roles, all parties involved must give the institutional resources required to meet these objectives. An overarching Africa strategy might be based on India prioritising its efforts to guarantee maximum impact by identifying the major drivers, for example. African countries and the African Union (AU) should devote more resources to the political and economic aspects of their connection with India in the twenty-first century as India's economy grows and its population grows.