

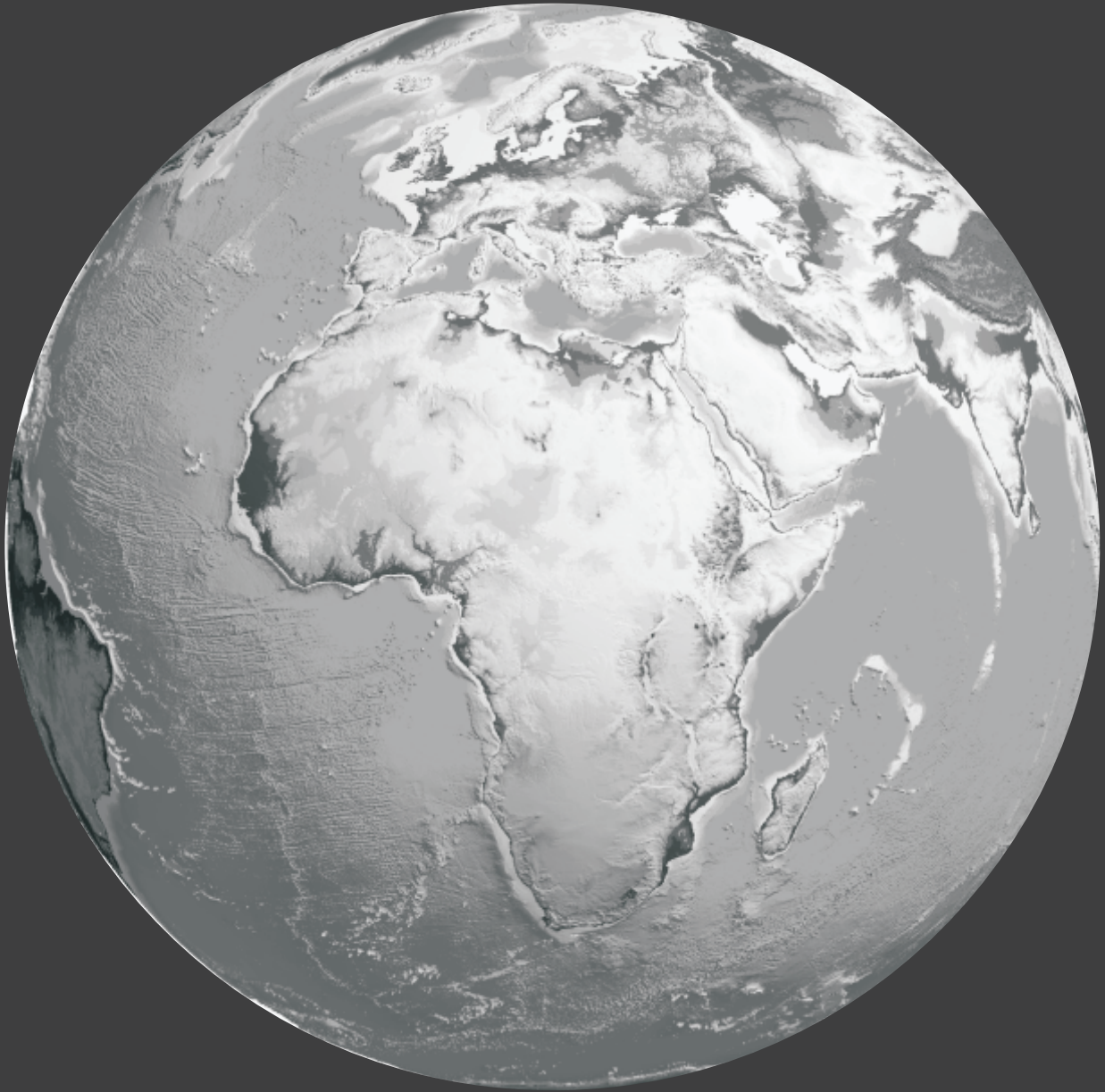
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Editor's Note

As the world acknowledges Africa's increasing influence, this edition offers invaluable insights into its evolving political climate, development pursuits, and diverse forms of external engagement. The Africa trends proudly presents a mosaic of narratives that underscore Africa's journey towards a prosperous future.

This compilation of expert analyses delves into diverse global perspectives. In the cover story, Md. Muddassir Quamar highlights India and Egypt's engagement due to their growing economic prowess and historical significance. In the commentary, Swasti Rao discusses France's potential struggle in Africa due to its lacking adaptability and advocates for pragmatic engagement and partnerships. In the next, Aarshi Dua evaluates Nigeria's 2023 elections, foreseeing their influence on regional politics and the rise of a youth-focused third party. Sindhu Dinesh delves into the tenth anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the visit of Qin Gang, which underscored the interdependence between China and Africa, while R. Vignesh reviews a book detailing Africa's maritime history and challenges, offering insights into naval dynamics. Together, these insights provide a multifaceted view of contemporary global dynamics and partnerships.

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Cover Story

INDIA-EGYPT “STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP”: REKINDLING THE HISTORICAL PROXIMITY

India and Egypt, with their historical ties and shared global perspectives, are strengthening diplomatic and economic relations. The recent elevation to a strategic partnership, highlighted by President Sisi's presence at India's Republic Day, marks a new era of collaboration. This emerging partnership has the potential to revive historical affinities and foster closer cooperation in various domains, benefiting both nations and the broader global landscape.

Md. Muddassir Quamar*

In January 2023, President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi became the first Egyptian leader to attend India's Republic Day celebrations. For students and observers of West Asia and Indian foreign policy this seems unfathomable given the historical proximity Egypt has enjoyed with India. In the 1950s and 1960s, Egypt was considered one of India's most important partners as the two along with Yugoslavia championed the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).¹ The friendship between Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and President Gamal Abdel Nasser is legendary and yet it took 75 years for an Egyptian president to be invited as the chief guest for Republic Day celebrations in New Delhi. Be as it may, the four-day visit of President Sisi during 24-27 January 2023 Delhi and his attendance at the 74th Republic Day celebration was a remarkable moment given the prospects for trade, business, investments and defence and security relations between the two countries.

India and Egypt are civilizational states and major actors from the Global South.² The cultural contacts between India and Egypt go back to ancient times. Scholars such as Muata Ashby³ and Sulabh Jain⁴ have explored the historical linkages between the two old civilisations. These linkages can be traced to contacts between Indus Valley and Mesopotamian civilisations. Historical evidence suggests mercantile and diplomatic contacts between Indians and Egyptians during ancient and medieval times. In the colonial era, both India and Egypt suffered economic deprivation and exploitation and rose up against the colonial rulers and the commonality of worldviews of Mahatma Gandhi and Saad Zaghloul seemingly brought the two countries closer. Modern India and Egypt gravitated towards each other because of the commonalities in political, economic, and cultural understanding and world views.⁵

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Indo-Egyptian friendship is also a testimony of the deep Indo-Arab and Indo-African relations. President Sisi is the fourth Arab and the 12th African leader to have graced India's Republic Day celebrations as chief guest.⁶ For President Sisi, this was his third visit to New Delhi; he had attended the *Third India-Africa Forum Summit* in New Delhi in October 2015 and returned for a state visit in September 2016.⁷ In between, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held several telephonic conversations with the Egyptian leader during the Covid-19 health crisis and met President Sisi on the side lines of multilateral events including UNGA (2015) and BRICS (2017). Additionally, there has been several important ministerial visits and regular diplomatic engagements between the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlining the robust political and diplomatic engagements.⁸

Rekindling old ties

Egypt is an important Arab, African, Mediterranean, and Middle Eastern country. Its location connecting Africa with Asia through the Sinai Peninsula and linking the Mediterranean Sea to the Red Sea through the Suez Canal provides it a unique geostrategic significance. Cairo hence simultaneously wields influence in Africa, the Arab world, West Asia, and the Mediterranean regions. The Suez Canal is the lifeline of international trade between Europe and Asia.⁹ After independence, India and Egypt emerged as two important post-colonial states and leaders in the Global South. They joined hands in resisting the Cold War political mobilisation through NAM and the trio of Nehru, Nasser and Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito were instrumental in shaping the NAM resisting the imperial powers and their geopolitical ambitions.¹⁰

The relations between India and Egypt faced some uncertainties towards late twentieth century due to the geopolitical shifts in West Asia and the World, but New Delhi and Cairo rekindled their relations in the twenty-first century. Egypt is one of the most important political, economic and security partners of India in Africa and the Arab world. With robust political and diplomatic relations, strong defence and economic ties and increasing people-to-people contacts, the bilateral relations have witnessed notable growth in recent years.¹¹

During his visit to New Delhi in January 2023, in addition to attending the Republic Day celebrations, President Sisi held delegation level talks with Prime Minister Modi on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest.¹² President Draupadi Murmu accorded a ceremonial welcome and hosted state banquet in the honour of President Sisi on 25 January. Later, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar called on President Sisi who was accompanied by a large delegation including ministers and business leaders. Resultantly, several interactions with the Indian business community took place with promise for improved trade and commercial activities. The visit also marks the 75 years of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Egypt and under its presidency of G20 in 2023, India has invited Egypt as a guest country to attend the deliberations of the grouping underlining the significance New Delhi attaches to the North African country.¹³

Egypt is one of the most important political, economic and security partners of India in Africa and the Arab world.

Besides holding bilateral talks and meetings with business leaders, India and Egypt decided to elevate the bilateral relations to “Strategic Partnership” including political, security, defence, energy and economic areas.¹⁴ Five memorandums of understanding (MoUs) were also signed between the two countries in the areas covering cyber security, Information Technology, cultural relations, youth cooperation and broadcasting.¹⁵ The joint statement issued on 26 January noted that by elevating the ties to strategic partnership, “the two sides seek to maximize the common interests and exchange support in a bid to overcome the difficulties caused by various consecutive crises and challenges the world is facing.”¹⁶ It further noted that Prime Minister Modi and President Sisi “reviewed the status of the bilateral relationship based on the pillars of closer political and security cooperation, deeper economic engagement, stronger scientific and academic collaboration, as well as wider cultural and people-to-people contacts.”¹⁷

Economic and Security Ties

Indo-Egyptian bilateral relations have witnessed notable improvement over the past years in economic and security spheres. The volume of bilateral trade has nearly doubled from US\$3.68 billion in 2017-18 to US\$7.26 billion in 2021-22 (**Table 1**). Notably, between 2020-21 and 2021-22, the growth in trade was nearly 75 percent. In Financial Year 2022-23, the bilateral trade stood at US\$6.06 billion with a share of 0.52 per cent in India’s total trade (**Table 1**). Indian imports from Egypt comprises of mineral oil and petroleum, fertilizers, chemicals, and cotton while Indian exports to Egypt include agricultural and food products, iron and steel, automobiles and vehicles and cotton yarn and textile. India is the 3rd largest export market for Egypt and 6th largest trading partner, while India is the 7th largest source of imports of goods and commodities to Egypt. In 2022-23, Egypt ranked 40th among India’s foreign trading partners.

Table 1: India-Egypt Bilateral Trade, 2017-23 (US\$ million)

	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23
India’s Export to Egypt	2,392.34	2,886.39	2,504.23	2,226.37	3,743.92	4,109.41
India's Import from Egypt	1,292.93	1,677.82	2,031.38	1,892.40	3,520.83	1,951.54
Total Bilateral Trade	3,685.27	4,564.22	4,535.61	4,156.77	7,264.75	6,060.95
India's Total Foreign Trade	769,107.15	844,156.51	788,070.32	686,244.36	1,035,056.45	1,165,000.88
Share of Egypt in India's total trade (%)	0.48	0.54	0.58	0.61	0.70	0.52

Source: Export-Import Data Bank, Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, Kolkata.

The growth in commodity trade is accompanied by an uptick in trade in services. Indian companies are one of the largest international investors in Egyptian market and this is set to grow as bilateral relations continues to improve. As of 2022, investments from India in Egypt stood at about US\$3.15 billion. Likewise, many Egyptian companies are active in Indian market. The two countries have also been working to enhance commercial engagements in areas such as clean energy and food security. In 2022, India came forward to send supplies of wheat to Egypt in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict that disrupted the global supply chains and raised questions over food security in Africa, West Asia and other parts of the world.¹⁸ Gas findings in the Eastern Mediterranean off Egyptian coast and Egypt's centrality in the formation of the *Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum* augurs well for Indo-Egyptian energy cooperation.¹⁹

Indian companies are one of the largest international investors in Egyptian market and this is set to grow as bilateral relations continues to improve.

Besides, India and Egypt have also developed a robust security and defence partnership over the years through close counter-terrorism cooperation and improved military-to-military ties. Egyptian officers have joined courses in Indian military schools while the two sides have also participated in military exercises hosted by each other.²⁰ A contingent of Egyptian military also took part in the Republic Day parade in New Delhi as a sign of enhanced defence ties. Given the multitude of security threats faced by Egypt, it has been working on modernisation of its armed forces with better training and acquisition of advanced weapon systems. In September 2022, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh visited and held talks with his Egyptian counterpart General Mohamed Zaki wherein a MoU on defence cooperation was signed. Among important issues that were discussed during the visit included joint India-Egypt training and defence manufacturing and co-production.²¹

...India and Egypt have also developed a robust security and defence partnership over the years through close counter-terrorism cooperation and improved military-to-military ties.

Indian and Egyptian defence and military officials have met regularly over the years to exchange views and explore possibilities of enhancing bilateral ties. India's Chief of Air Staff V. R. Chaudhari visited Cairo in November 2021 and in July 2022, Indian Air Force participated in the "Tactical Leadership Programme" at the Egyptian Air Force Weapon School to enhance joint operability in combat and search and rescue missions.²² Indian Navy too has been developing cooperation with its Egyptian counterpart with joint naval exercises and port visits. In June 2022, Indian and Egyptian navies conducted a maritime partnership exercise off the coast of Safaga in Egypt.²³ It has also been reported in the media that Egypt is interested in buying BrahMos missiles, 70 Tejas light combat aircrafts, and combat helicopters from Indian manufacturers.²⁴

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Conclusion

India and Egypt are two civilization states that have a natural claim to the leadership in the Global South and the world stage. While India is a rising power and the world's fastest growing large economies, Egypt too is a leader in Africa and Middle East. Their historical relations and convergence of views on the global issues and the potential for economic and security cooperation are bringing the two countries closer. Noticeable improvement in political and diplomatic engagements, economic and commercial exchanges and security and defence ties augurs well for the bilateral relations. The momentum built over the past years culminated into the invitation of President Sisi as chief guest for India's Republic Day celebrations in 2023 and elevation of ties to strategic partnership. The visit has created the impetus towards a new era of partnership between India and Egypt and this can be sustained, it can potentially revive the historical proximity between India and Egypt.

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Commentary

MACRON'S AFRICA VISIT: WHAT LIES AHEAD

Emmanuel Macron's focus on renewing ties with Africa has been a consistent theme throughout his presidency. Despite promising equitable France-Africa relations, his efforts have yielded limited results. His "New Africa Policy," introduced during his 2023 visit to Francophone Africa, aimed to establish a more balanced security partnership. However, skepticism remains among African nations due to a perceived lack of tangible actions to match his rhetoric. While Macron acknowledges Africa's global importance, the efficacy of his policies in achieving their intended outcomes remains uncertain.

Swasti Rao*

Re-setting ties with Africa has remained on high priority for Emmanuel Macron during his two tenures as France's President. In fact, revamping ties with the region was a core part of his election manifesto and his return as President in 2022 provided geo-political and geo-strategic continuity to his foreign policy agenda.

His presidential win in 2017 had Africans hoping for the ushering in of a new and a more equitable era of France- Africa relations. Macron's first overseas trip as President was to the former colonies in Africa as well. However, years into Macron's presidency, there has been little change on the ground.

Macron's latest visit to Francophone Africa in March 2023 saw the implementation of his "New Africa Policy", unveiled days before he embarked on the trip to Gabon, Angola, the

A Complex History: France's approach to its colonial past has been in stark contrast to its understanding of universalism.

Democratic Republic of Congo and Congo, his 18th trip to Africa as President. The policy is aimed at fostering a more equal security partnership.¹ Despite the wooing, the misgivings on the African side remain pronounced. While on the one hand, the persistence in Macron's approach towards Africa does reflect a realisation that the region has become a theatre of global competition,² but on the other, not backing his speeches with requisite actions have rendered

Macron's new Africa policy, like others, ineffective in achieving its desired goals.

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A Complex History

France's approach to its colonial past has been in stark contrast to its understanding of universalism.³ While France's national identity has been best expressed through strategic autonomy drawing from ideals of liberty fraternity and equality; its colonial past exhibits a bleak contradiction. Macron has tried to re-interpret France's inherent tension with its national identity and the horrors of its colonial conquests in Algiers and Sub-Saharan Africa.⁴ Historian Christelle Taraud has argued that in order to re-define France's universalism, a more "inclusive" history needs to be re-written that includes the voices of the colonial populace.⁵ Under Macron, France not only wishes to be known as a "free thinker" in the world but also wishes to re-set the conceptual framework for post-colonial ties with former colonies.

However, despite the resounding element of philosophical maturity, there is little enthusiasm in former African colonies for France's quest for an ideational post-colonial reset. The region strives for more political, economic, and military freedom. The unrest gets fuelled by the rise in influence of China, Russia, and Turkey whose high-level officials have been touring the region⁶ seeking closer ties in a far more equitable fashion than their former colonial master has ever offered.

The misgiving of Francafrique

Francafrique encompasses the socio-political-cultural- economic-military relations between France and those African countries that came under French rule or influence Benin, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal.⁷ While most of these countries gained independence during 1960s, but their relationship with France continues to be complicated and contested.

There is widespread dissent about the continuity in France's approach to treat the region as its *pré carré* ("own backyard"). The condescending overtones inherent in this approach are disliked by Africans who witness a continuation of what they perceive as France's meddling in their national politics, in particular French support to dictatorial regimes that thrive on people's poverty and systemic corruption.⁸

Macron's New Africa Policy

The quintessence of the New Africa Policy is to banish the notion of France as an arrogant former colonial power and substituting it for an image of a long term partner amid growing competition.⁹ Perhaps its most tangible implementation is that France's military bases in Africa will gradually be co-run with their host nations as Paris would reduce its military presence in the region.¹⁰ This is a significant step down from France's earlier military posturing at Mali,¹¹ Central African Republic¹² and Burkina Faso¹³ just about a year ago. However, the real impact on France's waning influence

The quintessence of the New Africa Policy is to banish the notion of France as an arrogant former colonial power and substituting it for an image of a long term partner amid growing competition

has been in the Sahel region¹⁴ which has also seen an inversely proportional rise of Wagner group's influence.¹⁵

Macron's New Africa policy is supported by various schemes and changes that are aimed at bringing the Francophone African regions at a more equal footing. As confidence building Macron decided to return cultural artifacts stolen during the colonial wars¹⁶ and enhanced a broad-spectrum interaction with all societal sections through the Africa-France Summit 2021.¹⁷ In 2021, he publicly acknowledged French failures in the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The most notable tool of Macron's approach to Africa, however, hinges on development assistance and investments.

Re-setting ties with economic statecraft

Macron increased ODA and FDI as instruments of furthering French influence in the region. France's development policy operates within the framework set by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015 by the United Nations General Assembly, the Paris Climate Agreement, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on financing for development. It is also aligned with the New European Consensus on Development, adopted in 2017.¹⁸ As a result, about 18 countries in Africa receive one third of French bilateral official development assistance (ODA) (2.9 billion Euro in 2020), an increase of 40 per cent from 2019.¹⁹ Sub Saharan Africa has been receiving the largest share of that ODA.

Further, France provides 8 percent of FDI into Africa and its trade of US \$55 billion is the largest within the European Union.²⁰ However, this economic assistance pales when compared with a relatively new entrant China who has not only emerged the biggest trading partner after EU but also a reliable lender.²¹

France's economic statecraft has also been of little avail to curb the dissatisfaction with the CFA franc...

France's economic statecraft has also been of little avail to curb the dissatisfaction with the CFA franc, a regional currency pegged to the Euro used by at least 14 francophone countries. Macron's efforts at refurbished economic statecraft by

increasing the flow of ODA and FDI to the region have not been able to suppress a genuine misgiving around the forced currency that stunts economic development.

The view from France, expectedly, is different. Back in the power echelons of Paris, it is touted as a guarantee of economic stability in francophone Africa which gets great financial support from the French treasury. But the arrangement of depositing half their currency reserves in the French treasury in lieu of a fixed exchange rate is not translating in economic benefits for the region. This seems particularly true as the economic options have widened after the entry of China and the US, particularly China. The dominance of CFA franc also comes in the way of Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)'s plans to create a common currency without the current roadblocks. Almost half a dozen francophone countries are members of ECOWAS. While the French have reiterated problems with a common currency, the Africans have sustained their search for freedom from symbols of colonialism.

Lack of pragmatism in France's approach

France's support and collaboration with autocratic regimes in Congo, Cameroon, and Chad for supposedly commercial and strategic interests, has over the years, made Paris see its influence wane. It is largely regarded as hypocritical on matters of democracy and human rights. These paradoxes render France's words ineffective and can no longer unite the French speaking population of the region.

France's waning influence

Mali, one of Africa's most democratic nations, had degenerated into insurgency and is now one of the poorest of African states. Recently, its junta gave Russia's paramilitary Wagner Group its security contract.²² A similar case of French inaction in Central African Republic, now a mainstay for Wagner, led to a further waning of French influence. Perhaps the case of Djibouti is most notable, where a former French colony is now seeing overwhelming international presence, most notably China's. Not just China and Russia, but also Turkey is playing on an "anti-colonial pivot" to engage more and more African countries.²³

The proliferation of anti-French rhetoric deployed successfully by Russia and Wagner...

Macron's campaign against disinformation in Africa

The proliferation of anti-French rhetoric deployed successfully by Russia and Wagner and then Turkey has pushed the Macron government to engage in influence operations and disinformation campaigns to re-instate its position in the region.²⁴

However, the real reason why France seems to be losing the great game in Africa is more to do with a refusal on the French sides to deploy pragmatism, inclusivity, and genuine economic statecraft to engage its former colonies. France should also look out for bankable partners like India to engage in significant triangular cooperation in the region for damage control.²⁵

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Commentary

THE 2023 ELECTIONS IN NIGERIA

The 2023 Nigerian elections carries significant importance as a means for the population to address a decade of economic decline, security challenges, and social unrest under former President Buhari. Despite offering a chance for positive change, the elections were marked by violence and turmoil. The newly elected President, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, echoed concerns raised in 2009 about flawed elections and an antidemocratic mindset. The need for genuine democracy and effective governance remains pertinent in Nigeria's ongoing struggles.

Aarshi Dua*

“Sustaining democracy in Nigeria will require more than just free elections. It will also mean ending a system in which corruption is not just tolerated, but widely encouraged and hugely profitable.”

- By Chinua Achebe, Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic

Electoral procedures represent the power of people to change and transform the political dynamics of a nation. However, when the electoral process is hindered by corruption, political unrest, instability, violence, and individual gains, it hinders the development of a nation as a whole. The 2023 elections in Nigeria emphasises on the same. The elections for the President of Nigeria were held on February 25th, 2023, marking a centenary of electoral history. The commentary tries to highlight the impact of elections on Nigerian politics & population. It also tries to understand the new regime's ambitions towards maintaining and sustaining the democratic rule in the nation.

Nigerian elections were conducted to elect President Muhammadu Buhari's successor and bring about electoral change in Nigeria. A former governor of Lagos State and nominee of All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Ahmed Tinubu, was named the winner of the 2023 Presidential elections by Nigeria's Independent National Election Commission (INEC) with 8,794,726 votes. His

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closest challenger, Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), received 6,984,520 votes¹.

Background

The 2023 Elections in Nigeria had a lot of significance in terms of humane values and the Nigerian people's desire to change and transform their existing circumstances. Africa's most populous nation, with around 220 million people in population had difficult and turbulent eight years under former President Muhammadu Buhari's reign with the decline in economy, security, development, and other critical areas. Since 2015, millions of jobs had been lost, and two-thirds of the population had undergone poverty². Nigerian currency Naira had plummeted as inflation had risen and oil output fallen to a 40-year low. Terrorism and violent instability had also spread throughout the nation, changing the day-to-day circumstances of the native population. Terrorists and militants in the north and central areas and separatist movements in the southeast had threaten every sector of Nigeria. As the economy worsened, the kidnappings had also increased nationwide³. The circumstances in Nigeria had also resulted in the migration of the young population from the nation in search of better life and circumstances on foreign shores. Thus, the 2023 elections represented a chance to change Nigeria's socio-political and economic circumstances. However, the elections had advanced with violence and widespread unrest in the entire nation.

The newly elected President of Nigeria Bola Ahmed Tinubu in 2009 had assessed that "no true democracy" has yet to be achieved in Nigeria. He had further added that, even though the President, the National Assembly, the Judiciary (at the federal level), the Governor, the State Legislature, and the Judiciary (at the state level) were all in operation, the years 1999 to 2009 were at most ten years of civil rule because "those democratic structures are built on the quicksand of a general antidemocratic mindset: flawed elections, dubious mandates, and abuse of security forces by the ruling party to rig elections."⁴ President Tinubu's 2009 statement has been validated in regard to the contemporary Nigeria as well.

2023 Elections and Political Violence

The 2023 Nigerian Elections were a watershed event in the country's political history, enabling a large number of candidates to compete for federal and state legislative offices without a chosen incumbent. There were eighteen Presidential candidates, only one of whom was a woman. However, it was a battle between the top four candidates, that were Bola Ahmed Tinubu of All Progressives Congress (APC), Atiku Abubakar of People's Democratic Party (PDP), Peter Obi of Nigeria's Labour Party and Rabiun Kwankwaso from the New Nigeria Peoples Party. All four represented different ideologies and approaches towards the development of Nigeria and the electoral process.

Tinubu, a seasoned politician, and former Lagos governor, served in President Buhari's government.

Tinubu, a seasoned politician, and former Lagos governor, served in President Buhari's government. Abubakar, the former vice president of Nigeria, faced previous election setbacks and corruption allegations. Peter Obi, former governor of Anambra, gained popularity among Nigeria's

youth due to his accessibility and minimal corruption charges. Kwankwaso, the former governor of Kano, enjoys widespread support in the northern region.

The electoral fight occurred amidst intense tensions between political parties and a succession of interlocking security issues that impacted all areas of Nigeria and the routine holding of elections. In the run-up to the elections, candidates, election officials, and politicians have been viciously attacked. Violence has been used by party militias, criminal gangs, and other armed organisations to repress opponents, discourage rival candidates from standing, and influence electoral procedures. According to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) reports⁵, insecurity has further soared since the beginning of the election campaign resulting in the escalation of tensions between ethnic and religious communities and assaults on the offices and personnel of the Independent National Election Commission (INEC). Native Nigerians were and even today are most concerned about insecurity, gasoline shortages, and the lack of fresh banknotes and currency, all of which exacerbate the country's economic woes.

The separatists and gang violence⁶ in Nigeria had spiralled to such a level that INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu had officially announced the non-usage of 240 new polling stations for the election. This was also done due to a lack of registered voters in those areas. The campaigns had further polarised the political and media environment, with numerous allegations against partisan outlets and political candidates refusing to attend media engagements. Several candidates were also accused of promoting hate speech and fanning inter-communal tensions, risking an escalation of electoral violence in a nation with a long history of political violence since Nigerian independence in 1960.

The separatists and gang violence⁶ in Nigeria had spiralled to such a level that INEC Chairman Mahmood Yakubu had officially announced the non-usage of 240 new polling stations for the election.

The ACLED⁷ documents almost 200 violent incidents involving party members and sympathisers during the year preceding the election, with over 100 deaths. These statistics were similar to the previous two election years run-ups, with over 150 occurrences and over 100 recorded deaths between 2018 and 2019 and an estimated events and over 90 fatalities between 2014 and 2015. Before the 2023 election, party supporters were most aggressive in the South East (46 occurrences), South West (45), South-South (38), and North Central (32). Approximately one in 10 incidents occurred in Osun, a battleground state where the PDP and APC have accused one another of instigating violence⁸. Majority of party supported violence in the 12 months preceding the 2023 election had comprised of planned assaults on people, followed by mob violence and abductions. Unarmed people were attacked in 80% of ACLED recorded instances, resulting in 75 of the almost 100 documented deaths between February 2022 and February 2023. "One of the deadliest reported incidents thus far, the PDP candidate for Ideato North and South federal constituency in Imo state was killed in his residence in Akokwa community in January 2023." Furthermore, INEC staff and other election officials faced threats and were subjected to violence and hate crimes concerning the 2023 election.

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Nigeria has been one of the most resource-rich and populous nation on the continent, with a present population of around 220 million people. It has been hindered and restricted by the continuing situation of internal conflict and crisis, transforming it into being only a vulnerable subregional power. Thus, coming of the new Nigerian President to power has been after a violent and turbulent electoral procedure. His position is hardly

enviable, with his upcoming tasks being hardly bearable.

Conclusion

The problems and challenges faced by new Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu are substantial. He would be required to combat pervasive corruption, reduce reliance on the oil export sector, revitalise the energy, agricultural, and mining sectors, improve education, particularly for the poor and lower-middle class, intensify the fight against Boko Haram and other criminal organisations, and promote regional integration.

Furthermore, revitalising the economy, preventing the young population from leaving the country due to unemployment, capitalising on infrastructural development like the Algeria, Niger and Nigeria pipeline, etc., and capitalising on the changing international market. These objectives need stability of the nation and is the primary task of the new Nigerian President.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the 2023 Presidential elections in Nigeria could be analysed as a significant development in regional and national capacities. Its outcome could influence the politics and electoral procedures of the neighbouring West African nations and at the same time, nationally, the emergence of a powerful third party (Peter Obi) focused on youth and people rather than parties or regional and ethnic affinity can set a precedent for growth of democracy in Sub-Saharan Africa and create political alternatives in regard to Nigeria.

¹ "Nigeria presidential election results 2023 by the numbers", February 28, 2023 at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/2/28/nigeria-presidential-election-results-2023> (Accessed March 17, 2023)

² Emmanuel Akimoto, "Young, qualified and barely scraping by – inside Nigeria's economic crisis", Guardian, 14 June 2021 at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/jun/14/young-qualified-and-barely-scraping-by-inside-nigerias-economic-crisis> (Accessed March 17, 2023)

³ Nigeria Election Violence Tracker", March 2023, ACLED, at <https://acleddata.com/nigeria-election-violence-tracker> (Accessed March 18, 2023)

⁴ Adeolu Durotoye, "The "Irreversibility" of Democracy and Nigeria's 2015 Presidential Election" in Adeolu Durotoye (ed), "Elections in Nigeria: A Contemporary Analysis", Germany, 2016, pp 1-23. (Accessed March 18, 2023)

⁵ "Political Violence and the 2023 Nigerian Election", 22 February 2023, ACLED, at <https://acleddata.com/2023/02/22/political-violence-and-the-2023-nigerian-election> (Accessed March 19, 2023)

- ⁶ Bruno Bilquin & Angelos Delivorias , “Nigeria: Situation ahead of the 2023 general election”, European Parliamentary Research Service, February 2023. (Accessed March 18, 2023)
- ⁷ The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) is a disaggregated data collection, analysis, and crisis mapping project. It collects information on the dates, actors, locations, fatalities, and types of all reported political violence and protest events around the world. (Accessed March 18, 2023)
- ⁸ “Political Violence and the 2023 Nigerian Election”, 22 February 2023, ACLED, at <https://acleddata.com/2023/02/22/political-violence-and-the-2023-nigerian-election> (Accessed March 19, 2023)

Viewpoint

DECODING THE CHINESE FOREIGN MINISTER'S VISIT TO AFRICA

In its 10th Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) anniversary year, Qin Gang's visit emphasized China's deep interdependence with Africa, showcasing its longstanding engagement and expanding bilateral and regional connections. China, Africa's top trading partner since 2010, invests significantly in infrastructure, healthcare, and mining. The visit, strategically timed amid economic challenges, aimed to build confidence. It demonstrated China's soft power influence and efforts to diversify cooperation beyond traditional sectors, implementing outcomes of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum.

Sindhu Dinesh*

For his first foreign visit after taking office, Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang embarked on a multi-leg tour to five African countries from 09-16 January 2023. For the past three decades, every Chinese foreign minister has started the year's foreign visits with a tour to Africa. Qin's itinerary was well planned out covering one country from each of the six regions of the African Union. He visited Ethiopia (East), Gabon (Central), Angola (South), Benin (West) and Egypt (North). Each of these countries hold significance in the current geopolitical dynamics and landscape of the African continent.

Backdrop and Focus Areas of the Visit

Ahead of the Foreign Ministers visit, spokesperson Wang Wenbin briefed the media underlining the priority China places on its traditional relationship with the African countries and the importance it attaches to deepening its strategic partnership with the continent.¹ Qin's visit to Africa is against the geopolitical backdrop of US-Africa Leaders' Summit concluded in December 2022 and the increasing trend of major powers engaging closely with the continent amidst the Ukraine conflict and its ramifications. Besides meeting the Heads of Government and his counterpart Foreign Ministers of the five countries, Qin met the Chairperson of the African Union (AU) and the Secretary-General of the Arab

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League. The key focus areas of Qin's visit were China's Belt and Road projects, distinct features of Chinese modernization, people-to-people connect, debt restructuring, infrastructure, and solidarity for cause of developing countries in the international arena.

Decoding the Visit

At Ethiopia, Qin met Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali, Deputy Prime Minister, and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen Hassen. In a joint press meet, they stated that China-Ethiopia ties remained unbreakable and had grown stronger over time.² Both sides signed a number of cooperation documents, including a memorandum of understanding on political consultation between the two foreign ministries. The Ethiopian leadership acknowledged China's exemplary constructions in Ethiopia such as industrial parks, infrastructure, and green economy.³

Chinese reconstruction efforts have been affected by the Tigray conflict and Ethiopia is highly indebted to China, nearly US\$13.7 billion. The conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region has led to a decline in its relationship with Western countries. In 2021, US responded by placing sanctions on Ethiopian officials linked to the conflict, reducing financial assistance and revoking Ethiopia's specific access to the American market as granted by the African Growth and Opportunity Act established in 2000.⁴ Due to this, China had raised concerns about the US interfering in Ethiopia's internal matters. Since the latter half of 2021, Ethiopia has welcomed numerous high-ranking Chinese dignitaries. For instance, in December 2021, the former Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited while returning from the China-Africa Cooperation Summit in West Africa. Xue Bing, China's envoy for the Horn of Africa, undertook multiple trips to the region during the previous year following his designation.⁵

During his discussions with the Prime Minister, Qin conveyed that China is committed to aiding the recovery of the Tigray region which suffered substantial devastation during the conflict.⁶ He highlighted China's readiness to expand collaborative efforts across diverse domains and expressed the intention to promote increased investment by Chinese companies in Ethiopia, thus contributing to the reconstruction endeavours. He noted that China has already dispatched humanitarian assistance, including food, vaccines, and other vital supplies, to assist populations affected by the conflict.⁷ Qin reiterated China's determination to maintain such aid and to play an active role in the restoration of areas impacted by the conflict.

In Addis Ababa, the FM was also received at the AU headquarters by the AU Chairperson H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat for the Eight China-AU Strategic Dialogue. At the dialogue, Qin made a four-point proposal: intensify in-person interactions and connectivity of ideas between China and Africa; further deepen friendly relations between China and the AU; upgrade and elevate China-Africa cooperation; and defend the unity and cooperation of developing countries.⁸ He said that "Africa should be a big stage for the international cooperation, not an arena for major-force rivalry".⁹ Remarking that the "so-called China's 'debt trap' in Africa is a narrative trap

...the "so-called China's 'debt trap' in Africa is a narrative trap imposed on China and Africa",...

imposed on China and Africa”, he underlined China’s commitment to help African countries ease their debt burden.¹⁰ They inaugurated the new headquarters of the African Centre for Disease Control (Africa CDC), a US\$ 80 million construction funded by China as part of its ‘health silk road’.¹¹ They also signed cooperation documents, including the economic and technical agreement on the Africa CDC.

In Libreville, Gabon, Qin met with President Ali Bongo Ondimba on 12 January, where he said that China-Gabon friendship remained rock-solid. They also discussed the distinct features of Chinese modernisation, synergy between development strategies, high quality Belt and Road cooperation and ways to help Gabon advance the ‘Emerging Gabon 2025’ strategic plan to realise win-win cooperation.¹² Qin also held talks with Gabonese FM Pacome Moubelet- Boubeya where both sides agreed to firmly support one another and forge more cooperation. Gabon exports oil, wood products and manganese ore to China. Gabon plays an important role at the regional level mediating conflicts and promoting economic cooperation. Currently, President Ali Bongo Ondimba chairs the Economic Community of Central African States (CEMAC); and Gabon is also a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for 2022-23. Gabon and China share a ‘comprehensive cooperative partnership’ and the bilateral relationship is set to only elevate further in the near future.

Along with commemorating the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations, Qin’s visit to Angola was a confidence building measure as Angola owes enormous debt to China. The visit sought to rekindle and concretise the existing partnership. In his meeting with President João Lourenço, the president acknowledged the positive contributions of Chinese companies in improving people’s livelihoods and said that Chinese constructions of airports, hydropower stations and roads have played “an indispensable role in the post-war reconstruction and economic and social development of Angola”.¹³ Qin appreciated Angola’s active role in regional and international affairs. Qin also held talks with Angolan FM Tête António.

In Cotonou, Benin, Qin met President Patrice Talon and called for synergy between Benin’s strategic development plan and China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The President said that Benin is keen to learn from China’s experience in terms of accelerating national development and revitalisation while Qin stated that Beijing would encourage more Chinese companies to invest in Benin adding that he hopes Benin would ensure the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese institutions and personnel are safeguarded.¹⁴ He also held talks with Beninese FM Aurelien Agbenonci. The two sides also signed cooperation documents on people-to-people, cultural exchanges and partial debt cancellation among others.

In the final leg of the tour, in Egypt, Qin met with President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi and his Egyptian counterpart Sameh Soukry. The two leaders discussed Sino-Egyptian relations, scope for promoting Chinese tourism to Egypt, increasing investments for infrastructure projects under China’s BRI and regional issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹⁵ The ongoing major constructions by China in Egypt include the New China-Egypt Suez Canal Economic Zone and the new administrative capital in Cairo. Nearly all of China’s constructions in Egypt are part of its BRI signifying Egypt’s key role in China’s long-term

BRI vision. China is among the largest trading partners and investors in Egypt. China and Egypt have expanded their ties in recent decades from political to include economic, military and cultural amongst others.

At Egypt, Qin held separate talks with the Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul- Gheit. The meeting built on the various aspects of the outcome documents signed at the First 'China-Arab States Summit' held in December 2022. FM Qin expressed China's readiness to build a China-Arab community and, safeguard common interests of developing countries.¹⁶

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Conclusion

This year marks the 10th anniversary of BRI and Qin Gang's visit brought out the interdependency between China and Africa. It signified China's long-standing role in the African continent and expanding ties at the bilateral and regional level. China has consistently been Africa's largest trading partner since 2010. It is also a major investor in infrastructure such as telecommunications, railways, hospitals and in mining projects. Amidst growing debt and economic crisis, the FM's visit is a confidence-building measure. The visit of the FM was well-timed and strategically executed displaying China's soft power leverage in the continent. China's cooperation with African countries is diversifying and expanding beyond traditional domains. Qin's trip was also an effort to implement the outcomes of the Eight Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in November 2021. Additionally, it is also an effort to deepen Chinese footprint and investments in the region.

¹ "New Chinese foreign minister heads to Africa for first trip", Al Jazeera, January 09, 2023, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/9/chinas-new-foreign-minister-heads-to-africa-for-first-trip> (Accessed January 24, 2023)

² "Qin Gang Holds Talks with Ethiopian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Demeke Mekonnen Hassen", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, January 11, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230111_11005855.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)

³ "Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed Ali Meets with Qin Gang", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, January 11, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230111_11005851.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)

⁴ Jevans Nyabiage, "Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang's 5-nation African tour a show of solidarity, strategic importance, analysts say", South China Morning Post, January 16, 2023, at https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3206824/chinese-foreign-minister-qin-gangs-five-nation-african-tour-show-solidarity-strategic-importance?campaign=3206824&module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article (Accessed July 21, 2023)

⁵ Ibid.

- ⁶ Jevans Nyabiage, “China pledges support for reconstruction efforts in war-torn Ethiopia”, South China Morning Post, January 12, 2023, at https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3206458/china-pledges-support-reconstruction-efforts-war-torn-ethiopia?module=hard_link&pgtype=article (Accessed July 21, 2023)
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ “Qin Gang Makes A Four-Point Proposal on the Development of China-Africa Relations”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 11, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230112_11006454.html (Accessed January 25, 2023); “Qin Gang Holds the 8th China-AU Strategic Dialogue with AUC Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 12, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230112_11005965.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ⁹ “Qin Gang: Africa Is a Big Stage for International Cooperation, Not an Arena for Major-Power Rivalry”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 12, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230112_11006524.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹⁰ “Qin Gang: So-called China’s “Debt Trap” in Africa Is a Narrative Trap Imposed on China and Africa”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 12, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230112_11006510.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹¹ “China Foreign Affairs Minister H.E Mr. Qin GANG visits the AU and takes part in the Inauguration of the new Headquarters of the Africa Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC)”, African Union, January 12, 2023, at <https://au.int/en/pressreleases/20230112/inauguration-new-headquarters-africa-cdc> (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹² “President Ali Bongo Ondimba of Gabon Meets with Qin Gang”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 12, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230113_11006919.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹³ “Angolan President João Lourenço Meets with Qin Gang”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 14, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230114_11007469.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹⁴ “Beninese President Patrice Talon Meets with Qin Gang”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 14, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202301/t20230115_11007677.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹⁵ “Qin Gang On the Outcomes and Common Understandings of the Egypt Visit”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, January 16, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230117_11009858.html (Accessed January 25, 2023)
- ¹⁶ “Qin Gang: Implement the Outcomes of the First China-Arab States Summit and Strive for More Early Harvests”, January 16, 2023, at https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/wshd_665389/202301/t20230117_11009930.html (Accessed January 2023)

Book Review

Timothy Stapleton (Ed.), *African Navies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2022, pp. 240.

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In the early 2000s as Somalia descended into becoming a failed state due to the prolonged civil war and its ungoverned resource-rich territorial waters became the target of foreign trawlers. Subsequently, Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing thrived in the Somalian waters depriving the local fisherman of their livelihood. Soon these fishermen were pushed into wielding AK-47 assault rifles instead of their fishing nets and their fishing boats became the new-age pirate vessels. Driven to the lucrative business of piracy, the Somalian pirates soon began to target commercial ships passing through the arterial maritime routes in the Gulf of Aden endangering the entire global commerce. Soon the leading navies of the world scrambled their assets to the Gulf of Aden to combat this localised threat that had global implications. The issue of piracy off the coast of Somalia drew the attention of the global community to the intricacies of how the lack of maritime governance on the 30,500 km African coast can create global ramifications. In this context the book '*African Navies: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*' edited by Timothy Stapleton assumes significance.

This edited volume consists of nine chapters written by authors with distinguished academic and research backgrounds that comprehensively cover the various facets of modern African navies. In the Introduction written by the editor, he earmarks three research gaps that the book seeks to address. Among them is the lack of research on Africa's naval history, literature predominantly focusing only on South Africa's naval capability and the existing notion of taking the African continent as merely a region where interaction between extra-regional powers occurs. Also in the introduction the editor divides the continent into three distinct maritime regions which are as follows:

1. North Africa: The Southern Mediterranean Rim
2. East Africa and the Indian Ocean

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3. The Atlantic Coast: West, West Central and Southwest Africa

The editor comprehensively chronicles on how Africa's maritime tradition evolved differently in each of these three regions influenced by ancient empires, the colonial conquests, decolonisation, the Cold War and rise of modern African navies. Also the maps illustrated in the introduction enable the reader to grasp the geostrategic significance of the African coasts to International shipping and maritime commerce.

The first chapter of this book authored by Charles Thomas gives the reader an insightful and comprehensive overview of how Tanzania's Navy was founded and evolved with the aid of various external actors. Tanzania is one of Africa's largest nations and has a coastline of 1,424 kms making it one of the most important coastal states of East Africa. In this chapter, the author articulately chronicles the deliberations and challenges faced by the Julius Nyerere-led Government in laying the foundation of the Tanzania Naval Command (TNC) as part of the larger Tanzania People's Defence Force (TPDF) during the 1960s. The authors bring out the circumstance that drove the Tanzanian Government to cooperate with China for raising the TNF. The Second Chapter written by Quentin Holbert gives an account of the unique naval history of the now-landlocked Ethiopia. Despite the lack of literature and documentation available, the author manages to narrate the ambitious efforts that were undertaken by the Haile Sellasie regime to establish the Imperial Ethiopian Navy (IEN) between 1953 and 1974.

The Third Chapter again authored by the editor turns its focus on the Western Coast of Africa by examining the foundation of the Nigerian and Ghana navies. The chapter particularly captures how these nations whose maritime perspectives were influenced by the British, as they sought to acquire warships as symbols of national prestige despite the limited resources that were available to them. This approach subsequently affected their ability to deal with threats such as insurgency, smuggling and piracy taking place in riverine or coastal areas where expensive warships like frigates cannot operate. These aspects have been further assessed in the Fourth Chapter authored by Lawrence Okechukwu Udeagbala where he makes a comparative analysis of the belligerent naval forces during the Nigerian Civil War. This chapter gives a detailed account of the asymmetric naval engagements between the navies of Nigeria and secessionist Biafra while making an assessment of how the maritime element played a decisive role in the outcome of the conflict.

The Fifth Chapter authored by Alexander Hill explores the Soviet forays into sub-Saharan Africa that were enabled through the dramatic expansion of its navy in the late 1960s and 1970s. The author assesses the role played by the Soviet Union in developing the naval capability of African states such as Mozambique, Algeria, Guinea, Ghana and most notably Angola. The Sixth chapter authored by Lisa Otta focuses on India's growing maritime engagement with the African Continent. For Indian readers, this chapter is interesting considering it presents an African perspective of India's rise as a global power, its strategic significance in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and its longstanding socio-cultural association with Africa.

In the Seventh Chapter authored by Andre Wessels, the history of South Africa's navy from its modest beginning in 1992 has been covered in great detail. The Eighth Chapter authored Enock Ndawana brings an intergovernmental perspective to Africa's maritime security challenges through the analysis of the naval capabilities of the nations in the South African Development Community (SADC). This is particularly important considering the maritime domain of Southern African nations has now become the site with increasing transitional crimes such as trafficking of humans, drugs and weapons along with IUU Fishing. The Ninth Chapter jointly authored by Alexander Hill and Timothy Stapleton enumerates the myriad of maritime security challenges that the African continent faces in the Twenty-First Century. The chapters also make an assessment of the capabilities of the various leading African Navies to counter this challenge. In the conclusion written by the editor, he alludes to the plethora of economic and political challenges that prevent many African nations to build and sustain functional navies. The editor brings into perspective on why African nations require credible naval capability. He recommends that the procurement of naval assets by African nations must take into account practical considerations rather than prestige-driven ambitions.

Overall, the book presents a comprehensive and insightful overview of Africa's maritime history, capabilities and challenges in a manner that is easily comprehensible to the reader. The book accurately captures how the geopolitical dynamics of colonisation, decolonisation and the Cold War had heavily influenced the development of the African Navies. The book brings to perspective how African Navies with an exception of South Africa have largely been dependent on external assistance. Acknowledging the realities and limitations of African nations in sustaining strong navies, the book makes certain key recommendations as to how the maritime challenges of the continent can be managed through the acquisition of cost-effective naval assets. This book will be immensely beneficial to academicians, scholars and researchers as it serves as valuable literature for understanding the various factors that have shaped modern African navies. For the Indian strategic community and policymakers, this book is particularly important considering Africa's growing significance to India's maritime ambitions.

Call for Contributions

MP-IDSA invites articles, commentaries and book reviews for publication in *Africa Trends*, a biannual magazine on Africa. Submissions can focus on security, political and economic issues relating to African countries. Articles may focus on analysing bilateral, regional and multilateral developments of strategic significance to India's engagement with African countries.

Articles could be of approximately 2000 words. Commentaries can range between 1,000-1,500 words (excluding footnotes) and book reviews between 600-1,000 words. Guidelines for contributors may be found at: <http://www.idsa.in/africatrends>. Submissions may be emailed to the Editor at idsa.africatrends@gmail.com.

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