

# The New Great Game: The Destination Africa

## Abstract

Indo- African relations inform India's emotional, aspirational and a bit of nostalgic part of the foreign policy. India's convention of Asian Relation Conference way back in 1947, which ultimately culminated in the creation of NAM and its successful espousal of the causes of Afro-Asian countries amply demonstrate our commitments. India Africa forum summit held in New Delhi in 2008 marked the beginning of a robust partnership. Bilaterally, both India and Africa agree that strong cooperation between the two is necessary to take the relationship ahead. The areas of cooperation are wide-ranging and include, among others, politics, trade and business, culture etc. Greater economic engagement has been seen as crucial to boosting ties between Africa and India. China is taking its role as a global superpower very seriously. Now China is looking to extend its sphere of influence in Africa. Leaders of 48 of 53 African nations were in Beijing for the three day china Africa forum .Unlike earlier Chinese regimes which aimed at propping up socialist governments in Africa, the main purpose of this summit was to ostensibly push trade and commerce .One of the primary reasons for Beijing wooing Africa is to secure a steady supply of oil to meet China's ever-growing energy demands. The close ties between Beijing and Africa have important lessons for India. As an aspiring world power India needs to go beyond outdated Non Aligned Movement –type rhetoric and engage seriously with Africa. Trade with Africa must be uppermost on India agenda but it cannot be the only elements. As India seeks to take its place in the high table of international politics, it must realize its responsibilities towards less developed nations. New Delhi policy towards Africa will be a good indicator whether India is ready to play the role of a great power in future. In my paper I have tried to deal with these issues in detail.

**Keywords:** Silk Road, Look-East Policy, NAM, Hope Less Continent, Africa– Rising, Team-9, Colonialism, Apartheid, NEPAD, AU.

## Introduction

The great game has had been played by different powers in different arenas at different point of time. In nineteenth century, Arthur Conolly, an intelligence officer of British East India Company's sixth Light Cavalry, coined the expression 'The Great Game' to describe the strategic rivalry between the British and the Russian Empires for supremacy in Central Asia. With the decline of Britain new players entered in new arena and the new great game started. The new great game or to be more precise 'the Cold War' has come to signify the conflict between the United States and the other western powers on the one hand and former Soviet Union and China on the other, over Central Asia's oil and South-East Asia's dominance. "But there is also another Great Game being played out in Asia: on the eastern fringes of the Indian subcontinent."<sup>1</sup> As India and China are out in open to have their definite foot-print in Africa in particular and in Asia in general. There are many issues real and potential between India and China but in many ways these are the side plots to a large story: The new Great Games for influence in the Indo-Pacific, which has arisen- "at the confluence of three strategies-1<sup>st</sup> China's maritime silk-road, 2<sup>nd</sup>. India's act east policy and the 3<sup>rd</sup>.the US rebalance to Asia."<sup>2</sup> This Battle of influence or new great game is not confined to Asia alone. Now it has moved to the continent of hope. Huge stakes are involved. Trade, energy and geo-strategic

Both the countries are there for at least two reasons- one to further their respective national interests by forging closer relationship with the various states of Africa and two to become the prime mover and shaker of the continent. For this both have adopted different strategies and treading different paths emanating from their respective political cultures, visions and approaches. Let us first examine the Indo-African engagements.

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**Indo-Africa Relations**

Indo- African relations inform India's emotional, aspirational and a bit of nostalgic part of the foreign policy. This nostalgia is not confined to Africa only but quite evident in the third phase of our Look-East Policy, where economic and political affinities are expected to be cemented by our cultural legacy. Our convention of Asian Relation Conference way back in 1947, which ultimately culminated in the creation of NAM and our successful espousal of the causes of Afro-Asian countries, forms the aspirational part of our foreign policy. The nonalignment is the by-product of our idiosyncratic value system. As J Bandyopadhyaya has well said "although the cold war provided the necessary context for nomenclature and operational strategies of nonalignment, the nonalignment as such was an inevitable consequence of decolonization process rather than the cold war itself."<sup>3</sup>

Our aspirations are quite modest one. India considers itself as a natural friend, philosopher and guide of Africa. We are emotionally attached with the continent because of the debt we owe to them. This was the place where one Mohan Das Karam Chand Gandhi landed for one year contract to sort out some legal problems, and this was the land which returned to India a precious gift 'Mahatma Gandhi' within a short span of time.

A gradual shift in the global power structure is being discerned over the past few decades. In the famous words of Fareed Zakaria "it is about great transformation taking place around the world...now we are living through third power shift of modern era. It could be called 'The Rise of the Rest'. Over past few decades the countries all over the world have been experiencing rates of the economic growth that were once unthinkable. For the first time ever, we are witnessing genuinely global growth. The share of people living a Dollar a day, or less, plummeted from 40% in 1981 to 18% in 2004 and is estimated to fall to 12% by 2015. This is creating an international system in which countries in all parts of the world are no longer objects or observers but players in their own right."<sup>4</sup>

**The Rising Africa and the Opportunities for India**

Africa has decisively shed the stereotype of a "Hopeless Continent" since 'The Economist' regrettably labeled Africa 'the hopeless continent' more than a decade ago. The Africa has moved a long distance since then. This profound change is acknowledged by the same magazine. At the end of year 2011 The Economist headlined 'the Africa Rising'. According to it the sun shines bright over Africa. On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2012 'Time' magazine published a report on Africa using the same caption as used by The Economist earlier. In a colorful article the Time journalist Alex Perry points out that "despite Africa's rapid economic growth over the past decade, the continent still faces numerous challenges, especially converting growth into jobs. If Afro-pessimism is out dated, undiluted Afro-optimism is premature."<sup>5</sup> India and Africa have shared a close relationship in the past. The first India Africa forum summit held in New Delhi in 2008 marked the beginning of a robust partnership. The second Africa India Forum Summit, held in Addis

Ababa in May 2011, emphasized the renewed focus of India to strengthen and enhance its partnership with countries in the African continent. Bilaterally, both India and Africa agree that strong cooperation between the two is necessary to take the relationship ahead. The areas of cooperation are wide-ranging and include, among others, politics, trade and business, culture etc. Greater economic engagement has been seen as crucial to boosting ties between Africa and India. India's trade with Africa amounts to \$ 70 billion by the end of year 2012, and is expected to rise substantially in the near future. Mutual efforts to increase trade include initiatives such as Focus Africa. India's commitment to Africa was underlined at the highest level. The then President APJ Abdul kalam affirmed that "Focus Africa program is one of the highest priority items for India."<sup>6</sup> The government has also announced 'Techno-Economic' approach for Africa-India Movement or Team-9 framework for cooperation, which has brought in a regional focus for its development projects and concessional loans; African countries in the region have been clamoring to be included. Shashi tharoor succinctly puts it "this co-equal multilateralism is an important feature of India's new model of engagement with Africa."<sup>7</sup> The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), an economic development program launched by the African Union (AU) to accelerate economic growth of African countries and promote greater participation in the global economy, has attracted Indian investment. While a large proportion of Indian investment has been in the energy sector, significant investments have also been made in the infrastructure, engineering, chemicals, services, banking and finance, health, information technology and telecommunication sectors in Africa."<sup>8</sup>

Another significant link with continent is the presence of Indian Diaspora in African countries. The greater integration of this community can significantly bolster bilateral relations. This focus on Africa is not new. In the first few decades of our independence, Africa became the largest beneficiary of India's technical assistance and capacity building programs writes former Union minister and renowned writer Shashi Tharoor. He rightly maintains "these cooperation programs laid the foundation of the political and economic partnership between India and Africa in twentieth century."<sup>9</sup>

Our identification with issues affecting Africa was evident even during freedom struggle. India imposed sanctions against the apartheid regime in South Africa. The AFRICA fund further closely identified India with Africa's struggle against colonialism and apartheid as the acronym AFRICA stood for Action for Resisting Imperialism, Colonialism and Apartheid. This Fund, in fact, was crystallized in New Delhi in 1986.

Democracy, Development, and Demographic Dividend, Trade, Technology and Training are some of the buzz words now defining Indo-African relationship. 2015 promises to be a year when these narratives of a rising Indo-Afro-optimism, set to intersect, and impart a fresh resonance to the emerging vocabulary of the multi-faceted India-Africa engagement. The increasing convergence of

interests, values and a burgeoning web of win-win opportunities will form a major part of our next summit expected to be held later this year itself.

This economic resurgence will be also reflected in other areas of engagement. Since the two sides launched an ambitious and multi-layered summit process in the summer of 2008, India has pledged over \$5.4 billion in Lines of Credit for a wide array of development projects across the emerging continent. Over 65 per cent of this soft loan package has already been disbursed. Going by past record, the new Indian government is expected to announce an ambitious multi-billion dollar developmental package at the New Delhi summit in 2015. In a signature initiative, India is also in the process of delivering on its promise of setting up over 100 training institutes in different African countries, encompassing a wide array of areas ranging from agriculture, rural development and food processing to information technology, vocational training, English language centers, and entrepreneurial development institutes. Trade, Technology and Training remains the enduring tripod that frames the multifarious India-Africa relations and will remain so in the months to come.

Many countries may have higher bilateral trade with Africa, but what sets apart India's engagement with Africa is its focus on innovative capacity building programs and the deployment of ICT, the country's forte, to help build a knowledge economy in the African continent. No project illustrates this thrust on innovation and development-driven partnership better than the India-assisted Pan Pan-African 'e-network' that provides telemedicine and tele education to Africans living thousands of miles away by linking them with top educational institutions and super-specialty hospitals in India. Over 1600 Training institutes offered under India's technical cooperation program to Africa, once they start functioning, could prove to be an asset in Africa's ongoing efforts to create a new generation of skilled and technology-empowered workers. The greatest challenge before Africa is to solve the riddles of food-scarcity. It is has been said that one of the most important impacts of climate change on human civilization will be an acute and permanent crisis of food supply. Reduction in crop yield could lead to higher prices of food and greater food insecurity; and increases in food prices globally could trigger regional food crises, causing political instability and further undermine the economic performance of weak and unstable states.

### Food Security

Food security is "a situation in which all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life".<sup>10</sup> Food security has three aspects; food availability, food access and food adequacy. The root cause of food insecurity in Africa is the inability of people to gain access to food due to poverty; hence the continent continues to lag behind in poverty alleviation. High prevalence of HIV/AIDS, civil wars, conflicts and poor governance, frequent drought and famine; and agricultural dependence on the climate and environment have contributed to the problem of

food insecurity. The challenges of food security in Africa include an under-developed agricultural sector, barriers to market access, effect of globalization which comes with liberalization of markets; disease and infection and government policies that emphasize structures and institutions rather than people. India with its experience of green revolution can help Africa solve the problem. Indian investment in agriculture and horticulture is mainly concentrated for export purposes. African agriculture has the capacity to produce food and become a bread basket for India. India has started a multi-tiered cooperative partnership which involves engagement with pan-African institutions.

Indian investors are respected across Africa, "because they are reputed to be effective in the local environment, to ensure the highest employment generation...transfers technology and to be quite willing to live among Africans and employ African managers".<sup>11</sup> The Indian pharmaceutical industry has established such a good reputation for providing Africans with urgently needed healthcare, at affordable prices, this has forced Chinese firms to fake Indian packaging. Shashi Tharoor the honorable member of Parliament has paid the rich tributes to Indian companies when he says that if imitation is the best form of flattery, counterfeiting is the ultimate confirmation of the indispensable role India pharma is playing in Africa.

Like India, Africa is also afflicted by terrorism. But the similarity ends here. Unlike India, African land itself is used to produce the scourge of terrorism. The recent months have brought into focus the deadly spiral of terrorism ravaging a large swathe of the continent. The proliferation of terrorist and extremist groups in the continent like Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, Nigeria-based Boko Haram, and Al-Shabaab and their suspected links with militants in other parts of the world entails a more proactive collaboration between India and Africa on the issue of terrorism. Looking ahead to the next stage in the India-Africa partnership, one can, therefore, expect a deepening of security cooperation across a spectrum of areas, including terrorism, piracy, and maritime security.

### The China in Africa

India must draw right lessons from Chinese foreign policy

China is taking its role as a global super power very seriously. The Chinese government sponsored a program of analysis which was devoted to search the ways and means which could convert the first twenty years of the twenty first century a distinct "strategic opportunity period" for China. This was in fact a Machiavellian tactics to visit the history in order to understand the present. Former and renowned secretary of state Henry Kissinger has defined this phenomenon exercise "what did China have the strategic opportunity to accomplish? To the extent the Chinese debate on this question can be said to have had a formal beginning, it may be found in a series of special lectures and study sessions convened by Chinese academics and the country's top leadership between 2003 and 2006. The program concerned the rise and fall of great powers in history: the means of their rise; the causes of their frequent

wars; and where, and how, a modern great power might rise without recourse to military conflict with dominant actors in the international system."<sup>12</sup> As the scholar David Shambaugh has noted "few, if any, other major or aspiring powers engage in such self-reflective discourse."<sup>13</sup> We should rather take a leaf out of Chinese recent strategic practices. It is disturbing to note that our foreign policy is always reactive and lacks anticipatory tact. Our foreign policy makers are mostly arrogant and at best bookish yet they think themselves as the only repository of requisite knowledge. Indian government should also seriously consider such kind of intellectual exercise in which the best brains of our country are involved. A country which prides itself in Rigvedic tradition of 'let the noble thought come to us from all the sides' is virtually blocking any thought other than the bureaucratic ones. Beijing has always liked to make its considerable presence felt in immediate neighborhood. Now China is looking to extend its sphere of influence in Africa. Leaders of 48 of 53 African nations were in Beijing for the three day china Africa forum. Unlike earlier Chinese regimes which aimed at propping up socialist governments in Africa, the main purpose of this summit was to ostensibly push trade and commerce. One of the primary reasons for Beijing wooing Africa is to secure a steady supply of oil to meet China's ever-growing energy demands. Already Angola has replaced Saudi Arabia as china s largest supplier of oil. Beijing also buys much of its copper, iron ore and cobalt from Africa. In 2012, the total volume of China-Africa trade reached \$198-40 billion, a year-on-year growth of 19.3%. Of this, US\$85.319 billion consisted of China's exports to Africa, up 16.7%, and US\$113.171 billion was contributed by China's imports from Africa, up 21.4%. China has given generous aid packages to African countries to build road railways and schools.<sup>14\*</sup>

The close ties between Beijing and Africa have important lessons for India. As an aspiring world power India needs to go beyond outdated Non Aligned Movement-type rhetoric and engage seriously with Africa. New Delhi need not of course get into a race with Beijing. China which has nearly 1 trillion in foreign currency reserves can play much faster and harder than India. Besides, China as a permanent member of the UN Security Council can use its veto to great advantage in protecting rouge African states. Instead, New Delhi must look to revive its historic links with Africa and use the large Indian Diaspora, particularly in South Africa, to good effect for furthering trade. India must also be careful of formulating an African policy that avoids the pitfalls of China embrace of regimes that have a poor human rights record. Both Beijing and New Delhi have been criticized for supporting the government in Sudan, which has been accused of grave human rights abuses, because of their investments in Sudanese oilfields. Trade with Africa must be uppermost on India agenda but it cannot be the only elements. As India seeks to take its place in the high table of international politics, it must realize its responsibilities towards less developed nations. New Delhi policy towards Africa will be a good indicator whether India is ready to play the role of a great power in future. On

the personal account of former Diplomat and Parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor, it can safely be asserted that Africans look towards Indians not the way they look at West or China. They look towards India with admiration and gratitude. We need to increase our presence there. Our embassies are ill staffed and are unable to cope up with the needs of modern industries and entrepreneurship. Apart from rivalry with China, we can search the opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. India and China are jointly exploring and developing a Sudanese oil field, for instance. Chinese are known to adopt the deceptive ways of buying the foreign governments and offering easy loans which is nothing sort of bribery. A democratic India can ill afford it. "There is a broader strategic dimension as well to the alleged rivalry in Africa- India's reported discomfort with the growing Chinese presence on African rim of Indian ocean (is one of them)..."<sup>15</sup>. The other Chinese move of bringing South Africa under the BRICS umbrella is also a matter of concern for India, because this very move has reduced the IBSA to a virtual redundancy.

For India, the China question will become even more pressing from a diplomatic point of view if the IBSA grouping- gathering together India, Brazil and South Africa since 2003-is not re-launched. India was supposed to organize the IBSA meeting last year. It is now supposed to host it next year. "But isn't the IBSA coalition redundant now, given that all its members have been part of the BRICS since 2012, when South Africa was invited to join by the Chinese (perhaps a calculated move)? Through IBSA, India, Brazil and South Africa could promote their soft power as the largest democracies of three continents. Within the BRICS, this is bound to be constricted by the domination of Russia and China."<sup>16</sup>

One interesting area of Chinese presence in Africa is that Chinese inroads have prompted something of an African backlash, with Zambia in 2011, electing a president who had campaigned on an openly anti- Chinese platform.

For India energy is the central motivational force to engage Africa in more than one way. With 70% of India's oil supply imported, mainly from West-Asia, we need to diversify our options. Africa obviously becomes our centre of attraction. ONGC and its foreign arm ONGC Videsh are already working in this direction. Nigeria is now supplying about 15% of the Indian requirement. Some other African countries, notably Sudan and Libya are the destinations our investments.

Besides bilateral issues, the Indo-Africa equations will also impact the contours of an emerging world order. As the UN celebrates its 70th anniversary, India and Africa should join hands to fructify the long-deferred dream of the reform and expansion of the UN Security Council, with seats for both New Delhi and the African continent in a reformed world body. In the intertwining of the Indian Dream and the African Dream, there is a lot at stake. As one prominent journal from Uganda, 'New Vision' wrote which is worth mentioning "Africa had a lot to gain from deeper links with India: 'there are lessons to learn from its strengths in agriculture, technology, financing and land tenure systems, and its

development path offers a highly relevant example for Africa.”<sup>17</sup>

### Conclusion

Africa is not zero sum game for India or China. India should draw the right lessons from Sino-African relationship and must not squander the grand opportunity. Besides bilateral issues, the Indo-Africa equations will also impact the contours of an emerging world order. As the UN celebrates its 70th anniversary, India and Africa should join hands to fructify the long-deferred dream of the reform and expansion of the UN Security Council, with seats for both New Delhi and the African continent in a reformed world body. In the intertwining of the Indian Dream and the African Dream, there is a lot at stake.

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