



India's Expanding Relations with Africa and Their Implications for U.S. Interests

J. Peter Pham

Abstract

An analysis that concludes that as the United States builds its own framework for broad, long-term engagement with an African continent that is increasingly recognized as strategically, diplomatically, and economically vital to U.S. national interests, India's burgeoning public and private investments in the region as well as its diplomatic strategy vis-à-vis African national organizations and individual states will not only affect U.S.-African relationships but U.S.-Indian relationships as well.

Introduction

Whereas the extensive network of economic, political, and military ties that the People's Republic of China (PRC) has constructed across Africa has been the subject of increased scrutiny on the part of policymakers and scholars in the United States and other Western countries,¹ India's expanding relations with the African countries have gone largely unexamined. However, as America continues to go about building its own framework for broad, long-term engagement with an Africa continent that is increasingly recognized as strategically, diplomatically, and economically vital to U.S. national interests²—witness the presidential decision earlier this year to establish the new, unified combatant command for Africa (AFRICOM)—India's burgeoning public

and private investments in the region as well as its diplomatic strategy vis-à-vis African regional organizations and individual states needs to be better understood.

Although to a certain extent New Delhi's approach to Africa can be viewed as driven by many of the same motivations as Beijing's—that is, the quest for the resources, business opportunities, diplomatic initiatives, and strategic partnerships that will be duly examined in this study—the dynamics of the emerging U.S.-Indian strategic partnership³ on a global level will dictate a very careful assessment of the implications of the subcontinental nation's growing presence for U.S. interests in the region. This requires in turn an appreciation for the historical experience that shaped the contours and continues to influence the ongoing development of Indo-African relations as well as U.S.-Indian relations.

The Background of Indo-African Relations

Contacts between India and Africa date to ancient times when Indian merchants conducted a relatively extensive trade along the eastern littoral of the African continent—a point that a leading Indian strategist, C. Raja Mohan, who serves on his country's National Security Advisory Board, describes as India's "near abroad." It includes "parts of Africa, the Persian Gulf, Central and Southeast Asia, and

the Indian Ocean region” in that order.⁴ Thus the historian Basil Davidson noted:

What the Phoenician-Berber connection had achieved in northwestern Africa... the traders and mariners of Greek-ruled Egypt, southern Arabia, East Africa and India largely repeated in the last centuries before the Christian era. By then the steady winds of the western half of the Indian Ocean, blowing back and forth between West India and East Africa in regular seasonal variation, were used by sailors who had learned how to trim their sails.⁵

The period of European colonial expansion brought an end to this long-range trading system. On the other hand, the incorporation of both the Indian subcontinent and large swathes of Africa into the British Empire facilitated the establishment of substantial communities of people of Indian origin in Africa.⁶ No less a figure than Mohandas K. Gandhi called Mahatma, the future father of Indian independence, was part of this movement, accepting a position with an Indian law firm in Natal in 1893 and remaining in South Africa until 1914, a period during which his leadership of the Indian community’s struggle for civil rights generated the first flowering of what would become his hallmark approach of *Satyagraha*, or nonviolent resistance to tyranny. In turn, Gandhi’s philosophy, which he put into practice to achieve India’s independence in 1947, was to inspire a generation of African leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, in their own national liberation campaigns.⁷

It bears recording that when India became independent, there were only four sovereign states in all of Africa: Egypt, Ethiopia, Liberia, and South Africa. India quickly established diplomatic relations with the first two and

had difficulty with South Africa because of its treatment of persons of Indian origin. For the rest of Africa, especially those under British colonial rule, India availed itself of its privilege as a member of the Commonwealth to post commissioners, often also accredited as consuls-general, who not only looked after the interests of their fellow citizens but also established ties with local African leaders. In fact the first Indian commissioner in British East Africa, the Nairobi, Kenya, based Apasaheb Balasaheb Pant, was so supportive of the nationalist aspirations of the African population that the colonial authorities demanded his recall. The solicitude of diplomats like Pant and his Accra based counterpart for British West Africa was appreciated by the leaders of the eventually independent African states. After Ghana’s independence, for example, one of Nkrumah’s first forays overseas was an official visit to India, and while Ghana was still getting its foreign service organized, the West African country entrusted the protection of its political interests in the Middle East to the Indian diplomatic legations in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Syria.

If Mahatma Gandhi laid the moral foundations for Indo–African relations, it was Jawaharlal Nehru who gave the relationship its political structure during his long tenure as India’s first prime minister (1947–1964). Declaring that Africa “though separated by the Indian Ocean from us [is] in a sense our next door neighbor” and that “in historical perspective, Indian interests are likely to be bound up more and more with the growth of Africa,”⁸ Nehru pursued a policy of supporting African national struggles against colonialism as well as against apartheid in South Africa. Together with China’s Zhou Enlai, Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana’s Nkrumah, Indonesia’s Sukarno, and Vietnam’s Ho Chi Minh, Nehru played a leading role in convening the first Asian–African Conference, which brought together representatives of 29 African and Asian countries in the Indonesian city of Bandung and gave rise to the Nonaligned

Movement (NAM)⁹. Unlike the leaders of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which hoped to use the NAM to advance Mao Zedong's revolutionary ambitions worldwide, or Egypt, which saw the organization as a vehicle for promoting Nasser's pan-Arabism in the Middle East, India's nationalist leaders were committed to blazing a truly independent path in international relations. As Nehru wrote on the eve of India's independence, "India could not be a mere hanger-on of any country or group of nations; her freedom and growth would make a vital difference to Asia and therefore to the world."¹⁰

However, early hopes of a more intensive Indo-African partnership were dashed when China and India came to blows over border disputes and the Sino-Indian War of 1962 left the PRC in possession of the contested areas. The result was not only a setback for India's standing among the NAM nations (only Egypt stood firmly behind India) but also led policymakers in New Delhi to adopt a less ambitious national policy, focusing instead on building their country's defense sector and securing its immediate neighborhood. (In contrast, the leaders in Beijing, at least until the Cultural Revolution, decimated the ranks of their experienced diplomats, acted as if the Sino-Soviet schism had given them added impetus to pursue engagements with the "nonaligned" countries of Sub-Saharan Africa in order to counter the ideological influence of their rivals in Moscow.¹¹) Nonetheless India continued to support national liberation movements in Africa generously, both financially and politically. New Delhi even accorded formal diplomatic recognition to South Africa's African National Congress (ANC) in 1967 and future Namibia's South West African People's Organization (SWAPO) in 1985 during the premier-ships, respectively, of Pandit Nehru's daughter Indira Gandhi and his grandson Rajiv Gandhi.¹²

Even if official Indian policy paid less attention to Africa, however, it should be noted that the India diaspora was always present on the

continent and played an important part in the economic life of the countries where they settled. In some cases they were victims of their own success, attracting the malevolent attention of despots like Uganda's Idi Amin who first found them useful scapegoats for an economy wrecked by his squandering on military hardware and personnel and then, in 1972, ordered the expulsion of an estimated 45,000 individuals of South Asian descent—thus tragically collapsing what remained of his economy.¹³ Nevertheless, through time and the vicissitudes it brought, these communities endured as a bridgehead for Indian interests—cultural, economic, and political—in Africa. Former Indian Foreign Secretary Salman Haidar, for example, hailed the *felix culpa* that people of Indian origin "went through the constraints and indignities of the apartheid era and joined in the fight against it." Now, he wrote recently, "their ties with the mother country are strengthening and they can be regarded as a significant base for expansion of trade and commerce."¹⁴

In short, although India's foreign policy during much of the cold war did not have a significant direct impact on the unfolding of developments in Africa, its political commitment to the NAM and its at least rhetorical emphasis on South-South cooperation, especially coupled with its consistent diplomatic support for African nationalist movements, left it well positioned to take up its engagements across the continent and forge new ties, as it has done in recent years.

India's Quest for Natural Resources

India's economy is projected to grow at a rate of somewhere between 8 and 10 percent annually over the next two decades¹⁵ and is the only major economy predicted to record growth rates significantly above 3 percent by

2050.¹⁶ Analysts expect the country, home of the world's fourth-largest economy, to become a trillion-dollar economy as early as next year.¹⁷ The country's population of 1.1 billion accounts for one-sixth of humanity, including more than half of Indians under the age of 24.9, compared to rapidly aging populations in other major countries such as China. Despite the dynamism that these data imply and in light of the fact that its proven petroleum reserves remain stagnant at less than 0.5 percent of the world total, India faces a potentially serious energy crisis. Currently the country is the fifth largest consumer of energy in the world, accounting for some 3.7 percent of total global consumption. A third of this, moreover, comes from traditional sources of fuel, including wood, dung, crop residue, biogas, and waste. However, with increased development, India is expected to double its energy consumption by 2030, overtaking Japan and Russia in the process to become the world's third largest consumer (after the United States and China). These new needs can hardly be expected to be met by the traditional sources used by many households on the subcontinent.¹⁸

According to data from the International Energy Agency, India currently imports about 75 percent of its oil, a foreign dependence projected to rise to more than 90 percent by 2020.¹⁹ Given that most of these imports are coming from the volatile Middle East, where political conditions can easily give rise to temporary disruptions that would nonetheless jeopardize the country's economic security, it is more than understandable that India would seek an alternative supply of energy in the burgeoning African oil sector. Thus, for example, the overseas division of India's state owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), ONGC Videsh (OVL), has aggressively sought stakes in exploration and development across the continent. In 2005, teaming up with the world's largest steel maker, Mittal (now Arcelor Mittal), owned by London-based Indian billionaire Lakshmi Mittal, OVL formed a new

entity, ONGC Mittal Energy Ltd. (OMEL), that agreed to a \$6 billion infrastructure deal with Nigeria in exchange for extensive access to some of the best production blocks in that West African country. More controversially, last year OVL plunked down \$690 million to acquire a 25 percent stake in Sudan's Greater Nile Oil Project, despite the resistance of the PRC's China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) that has a 40 percent ownership in the enterprise. OVL has subsequently acquired minority interests in two other blocks in Sudan. Meanwhile another Indian state-owned entity, the India Oil Corporation (IOC), has invested \$1 billion in an offshore block in Côte d'Ivoire. ONGC recently obtained permission to conduct geological studies in the exclusive economic zone of Mauritius. Other African countries being courted by Indian oil companies include Burkina Faso, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal. In total, Africa currently accounts for about 20 percent of India's oil imports, a figure that will only rise in coming years. It is not surprising that energy researchers have found that "India has focused development lending initiatives on the resource-rich countries of West Africa whose [national oil companies] are keen to gain deals."²⁰

Hydrocarbons are not the only natural resources being sought by the growing Indian economy. Vedanta Resources, a publicly traded metals conglomerate founded in Mumbai in 1976, has invested more than \$750 million in Zambian copper mines, and recently the Liberian parliament ratified a 25-year deal allowing Arcelor Mittal to launch a \$1 billion iron ore mining project that will eventually employ 20,000. In Senegal a joint public-private Indian group has invested \$250 million in exchange for a stake in a colonial era enterprise, Industries Chimiques du Senegal, with rock phosphate mines and plants to produce phosphoric acid used in agriculture. Indian firms are also beginning to see in Africa a possible solution to their country's food security challenge as

formerly agricultural lands are lost to urbanization and industrialization. Last year, for example, two Indian firms, Ms Mashuli Gashmani Ltd. and Angelique, invested a total of \$12 million in Uganda to establish, respectively, a commercial prawn fishery and turnkey aquaculture development. Such enterprises will undoubtedly proliferate as India, where the average food energy intake per person is still below 2,500 kcal and the population is set to grow at an average of more than 1 percent per year over the next three decades, overtake China's as the major drivers of growth in world demand for agricultural products.²¹

The Allure of Business Opportunities

A recent report published by Chatham House (formerly the Royal Institute of International Affairs), noting that African countries are proving to be very attractive to Indian investors, observes that "India has sought to gain a foothold in these countries by writing off debts owed under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries [HIPC] Initiative and restructuring commercial debts. At the same time, the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank has extended lines of credit to governments, commercial banks, financial institutions and regional development banks."²² India has canceled the debts of five HIPCs in Africa—Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia—while its EXIM Bank has extended lines of credit to institutions in a number of African countries, including Angola, Djibouti, Ghana, South Africa, Sudan, Togo, and Zambia.

Since the launch of the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program in 1964, New Delhi has leveraged its human capital strengths to forge ties with developing countries, providing assistance to some 154 states since then.²³ As a farewell tribute to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam as he left office in July, the

Indian cabinet approved an initial \$100 million for the Pan-African E-Network that he proposed in order to bridge the digital divide on the continent through a network of satellite, fiber optics, and wireless connections that would also highlight India's strengths in the technological and medical sectors. As a start, seven universities and twelve advanced hospitals in India would be linked to five universities, fifty-three clinics, and fifty-three distance education centers in Africa.²⁴ Of course, this type of scientific and technical cooperation, over time, can mature into economic ties. Within the framework of the Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement (TEAM-9) that it launched in 2004, India has extended more than \$500 million in highly favorable credit to eight African countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and Senegal) linked to the purchase of Indian goods and services; a number of other African countries have lined up to join the program. Cumulatively these initiatives highlight the increasing maturity of effort to integrate India's commercial and political diplomacy.²⁵

Major private-sector Indian industrial conglomerates like the Tata Group and the Mahindra Group have made considerable headway in Africa as have infrastructure-building concerns like KEC International, the overseas arm of Kamani Engineering Corporation, which has projects in Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tunisia, and Zambia. Government-owned concerns are also profiting from large-scale projects, especially where official Indian development assistance is involved. For example, Senegal used a grant from the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to hire the RITES consultancy owned by the Indian Ministry of Railways to conduct a feasibility study of constructing a railroad linking the Dakar-Tambacounda line with Ziguinchor in the economically disadvantaged Casamance region. RITES has also had consulting contracts in Kenya and Mozambique and has

been involved in road design work in Ethiopia and Uganda. Another enterprise owned by the Ministry of Railways, Ircon International, has built railways in Algeria, Mozambique, Nigeria, Sudan, and Zambia.

Leading exports from India to Africa currently include machinery, transport equipment, paper and other wood products, textiles, plastics, and chemical and pharmaceutical products. With HIV/AIDS and other diseases ravaging the continent and driving up demand for lower-cost generic antiretrovirals and other drugs, Indian pharmaceutical firms like Cipla and Ranbaxy have opened entirely new markets. According to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), trade between the subcontinent and Africa has been growing at the annual rate of 25 percent in recent years. In October 2006 a CII-sponsored "Conclave on India–Africa Project Partnership" in New Delhi attracted more than 750 delegates and produced business deals worth \$17 billion.²⁶ The CII subsequently followed up in the summer of 2007 with a series of "regional conclaves" held in Kampala, Uganda, Maputo, Mozambique, and Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire that drew representatives of the public and private sectors from a total of 42 African countries to meet with their counterparts from India.

The Diplomatic Game

Over the last decade India's foreign policy establishment has endeavored to overcome the institutional neglect to which it was constrained to consign Africa after the promising start of the immediate postindependence period. Until 2003 the Ministry of External Affairs had only one joint secretary with responsibility for the singular Africa division; nowadays three joint secretaries manage three regional divisions covering the continent. In the 1990s India was closing down diplomatic missions in Africa as an economy measure; today it has 25 embassies or high commissions on the

continent, and four others are scheduled to open over the next two years. A multilateral India–Africa summit consciously modeled on the October 2006 historic Beijing summit of the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), which brought almost 50 African heads of state and ministers to the Chinese capital, is planned for early 2008 in New Delhi. The diplomatic attention has already paid off. Last year the chair of the Council of Ministers of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Foreign Minister Aïchatou Mindaoudou of Niger, threw the weight of the 15-member subregional group behind India's bid for a seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Unlike their Chinese counterparts, who have made travels through Africa an almost seasonal ritual, Indian leaders have been strangely reluctant to visit the continent despite its growing importance: The last time an Indian head of government paid a visit to Nigeria, India's second largest source of oil, was 1962. There are nonetheless some indications that this may be changing. Last July, for example, External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee visited Ethiopia not only to meet with African Union Commission Chairperson Alpha Oumar Konaré but also to sign a series of wide-ranging bilateral economic and political agreements with his Ethiopian hosts. During his sojourn in the Ethiopian capital, Mukherjee convened a conference of the heads of India's diplomatic missions in Africa to announce a more active policy toward the continent.

On a more ambitious global level, a loose political alliance of India, Brazil, and South Africa, formally called the India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum, was launched in 2004 with the goal of achieving common positions at the UN, the Doha Rounds, and other multilateral settings for the three major "southern" nations.²⁷ Annual summits of the leaders of the IBSA states have so far been held in New Delhi (2004), Cape Town (2005), and Brasilia (2006). The cornerstone of this

grouping is clearly the important historical links between India and the ruling African National Congress. At the end of talks in July 2007 between the foreign ministers of the three countries, the nations agreed to strengthen their mutual ties by increasing their trade 50 percent by 2010 from its current level of \$10 billion. Commerce between India and South Africa is expected to account for most of the boost.²⁸

Military Stratagems of an Emerging Power

The shadow of the nonviolent Mahatma Gandhi notwithstanding, India's leadership has recognized that a rising power also needs the ability to project "hard power" in proportion to other elements of its "soft power," including economic power.²⁹ India today has the world's third largest army, fourth largest air force, and seventh largest navy.³⁰

Particularly since the end of the cold war, as befits a responsible stakeholder in the international system, India has put its military at the service of global order, participating in numerous UN peacekeeping operations, many in Africa. Among other deployments, Indian forces have been involved in "blue helmet" missions in Mozambique, Somalia, Angola, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Liberia. The Indian contingents with missions between Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE) and in the DRC (MONUC) represent the largest national contributions to both forces, whereas the contingent deployed since January 2007 to the Liberian mission (UNMIL) under Commander Seema Dhundia enjoys the distinction of being the first all-female UN peacekeeping unit ever deployed. Drawing on its own long experience, India has also helped train the South African National Defense Force (SANDF) for peacekeeping missions now that the end of apartheid

has made it possible for South Africa to do its part in regional security efforts. Although not all of these Indian deployments have been stunning successes—the contretemps of Indian Major-General Vijay Jetley's tenure as commander of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) are legendary in the annals of peacekeeping³¹—they represent extraordinary commitments to collective security burden sharing despite not insignificant domestic and international constraints.

As part of its defense diplomacy India has also invested in future African military leaders, over the years training thousands of officers from a number of African countries in the academies of its three service branches as well as the postgraduate National Defense College in New Delhi and Defense Services Staff College in Wellington. Among the beneficiaries of this type of advanced training was Olusegun Obasanjo, president of Nigeria until this past May, who, during both his tenures in the presidency (military ruler, 1976–1979; civilian president, 1999–2007), hosted Indian military chiefs of staff for talks aimed at strengthening defense cooperation. As a result of these ties, India was involved in the transformation of the Nigerian Defense Academy in Kaduna into the tertiary-level, degree-granting Nigerian Military University.

In February and March 2007, Vice-Admiral J. Mudimu, chief of the South African Navy, paid an extended visit to his Indian counterpart, Admiral Sureesh Mehta, chief of the Naval Staff of the Indian Navy, to work out mechanisms for cooperation between the two countries for regional security in the Indian Ocean, particularly for dealing with terrorism and piracy. The two officers also explored the possibility of creating a naval component to the IBSA alliance and discussed a joint exercise, likely to take place in early 2008, that will establish commonalities of tactical approaches and aim for procedural interoperability of their forces. Whatever becomes of this South–South military cooperation exercise, the Indian navy

will remain a particularly important part of the country's engagement in the Indian Ocean and a vital force of stability in the region—as evidenced by its ability to deploy quickly after the tsunami at the end of 2004 where it joined Australia, Japan, and the United States to form the “core group” that coordinated the initial international response. As the threat of piracy continues to rise in the western Indian Ocean off the coast of Somalia (at the time of this writing, only halfway through the calendar year, there have been 15 armed attacks on vessels in these waters, making them the riskiest in the world),³² it is likely that India will play an increasing role in ensuring the safety of the sea lanes, especially because the naval resources of the United States are stretched by other operations.

The relatively small Indian defense industrial sector has also made some forays recently into Africa, supplying patrol vessels (SDB Mk-2 seaward defense boats) and light helicopters (SA-316B Alouette III and SA-315B Lama craft) to several African states.³³ India has also become a major customer for South Africa's arms exports according to one assessment by the U.S. intelligence community.³⁴ Relations between the South African arms industry and the India Ministry of Defense became so tight at one point that Denel, the spun-off armaments manufacturing unit of South Africa's state owned ARMSCOR (Armaments Corporation of South Africa Ltd.), for example, was implicated in the procurement scandals that were exposed earlier in this decade.

Implications for U.S. Interests and the America–India Partnership

Last year the administration of President George W. Bush declared that “Africa holds growing geo-strategic importance and is a high

priority of this Administration”³⁵—as well it should be for a region that not only currently supplies the United States with more hydrocarbons than the Middle East but also presents significant political, security, and humanitarian challenges. Whereas the growing influence of any other major actor on the continent bears very careful watching, there are a number of reasons why New Delhi's increased engagement in Africa, unlike that of Beijing, ought to be cautiously welcomed in Washington.

First, India's *modus operandi* on the continent not only benefits Indians; it also benefits Africans. As Karen Monaghan, the national intelligence fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, has observed, India can teach Africa a few things about the “importance of entrepreneurship” for “driving and generating jobs, and generating income, and generating growth,” noting that “Indian companies are much more integrated into African society and the African economy,” hiring locally and emphasizing training Africans how to maintain and repair the plants they build.³⁶ Unlike China, which is often viewed as a predator interested only in extracting commodities, India has encouraged technology transfers to its African partners.³⁷

Furthermore, the lessons that India learned while freeing itself from the oppressive “Hindu rate of growth”—the 3.5 percent annual rate of economic growth that just barely kept pace with the population increase³⁸—and the economic liberalization begun in the 1990s under then Finance Minister (now prime minister) Manmohan Singh are precisely those that African states need to study for their own development rather than the “no strings attached” blandishments that are offered to them by China's mercantilist mandarins. Moreover, for African states, many of which are plagued by instability, autocracy, and ethnic and religious strife, India offers the example of a successfully developing country where speakers of 22 different official languages (in addition to English) as well as an estimated 1,652 mother tongues have coexisted largely peacefully for six

decades, acquiring ever greater national consciousness while building the world's largest democracy. Despite its difficult birth as an independent nation in the midst of the religious partition that created Pakistan, India is home to what by most measures is the second largest Muslim population of any nation in the world. (Until the inauguration in July of a successor, the president of India [Abdul Kalam] was a Muslim; the prime minister is, as his name indicates, a Sikh; the chair of the ruling coalition, Sonia Gandhi, *née* Sonia Antonia Maino, is the Italian-born, Roman Catholic widow of assassinated former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi). As Prime Minister Singh has noted:

If there is an "idea of India" by which India should be defined, it is the idea of an inclusive, open, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society. I believe that this is the dominant trend of political evolution of all societies in the 21st century. Therefore, we have an obligation to history and mankind to show that pluralism works. India must show that democracy can deliver development and empower the marginalized. Liberal democracy is the natural order of political organization in today's world. All alternate systems, authoritarian and majoritarian in varying degrees, are an aberration.³⁹

Second, the burgeoning Indian–African relationship is good for the United States overall, especially given the strategic ties that the two countries have forged in recent years in a bilateral relationship that may go down as one of the longest lasting foreign policy accomplishments of the Bush presidency.⁴⁰ As former U.S. Ambassador to India Robert Blackwill put it, India is "an answer to some of our major geopolitical problems."⁴¹ Among other things, the United States can benefit in many of its security preoccupations in Africa from the tacit—and

occasionally explicit—support of India, which has gained enormous political capital from its cofounding and longtime leadership of the Non-aligned Movement as well as its support of anticolonial and antiapartheid movements on the continent. On the other hand, no country has lost more of its citizens to Islamist violence than India, which even today remains one of the states most targeted by *jihadis*. As former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger has pointed out, in an age of terrorism and a potential "clash of civilizations," both India and the United States have parallel objectives in countering terrorism and defeating (or at least pacifying) radical Islam.⁴² Hence New Delhi is a potentially ideal complement to Washington's counterterrorism agenda for Africa, India's history enabling its government to articulate the antiextremism, prodemocracy message credibly in places where, quite simply, American credibility is very limited.⁴³

Of course, the United States can hardly expect a proud and democratic nation like India simply to be its messenger boy, much less its lackey. As one scholar told a congressional hearing, the country's large size, ancient history, and great ambitions ensure that "India will likely march to the beat of its own drummer."⁴⁴ Furthermore, with respect to India's involvement in Africa, political and other opinion leaders in the United States must be careful to avoid the temptation to give reign to the alarmism that has characterized the overwhelming plurality—if not the absolute majority—of American policy discussions about the PRC's political and commercial investments on the continent. On the other hand, India is not likely to present a direct challenge to core U.S. interests in what is now the geostrategically vital region of Sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, as it plays commercial catch-up (India's exports amount to just 10 percent of China's), the subcontinental country's economic interests are more likely than not to clash with those of the Middle Kingdom⁴⁵—a development that America will hardly not be elated over given

the serious challenge that China's approach to Africa has posed not only to Western companies and aid agencies but to the entire reform agenda for the continent.⁴⁶ As one analyst wisely noted, the U.S.–Indian relationship “should not be judged in terms of immediate deliverables, but the gradual convergence of national interests.”⁴⁷

Conclusion

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has openly stated that it is part of America's grand strategy to “help make India a major world power in the twenty-first century.”⁴⁸ Ambassador Blackwill has recently advanced the thesis even further, arguing that:

It is safe to say that the alignment between India and the United States is now an enduring part of the international landscape of the 21st century. The vital interests of both Washington and New Delhi are now so congruent that the two countries can and will find many ways in which to cooperate in the decades ahead. Over time, the U.S.–India relationship will come more and more to resemble the intimate U.S. interaction with Japan and our European treaty allies.⁴⁹

Of course, that type of strategic partnership requires constant nurturing across multiple arenas. Africa, where both the United States and India not only have important interests but—as the world's most powerful democratic state and its most populous, respectively—share common ideals, is an excellent place to start to cultivate that flexibility and mutual consideration. After all, as both the American president and the Indian prime minister have noted, the two countries are “natural partners.”⁵⁰

About the Author

A member of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy's Board of Advisers, J. Peter Pham is director of the Nelson Institute for International and Public Affairs at James Madison University. Dr. Pham's most recent book, a volume on U.S. foreign policy toward Africa entitled *Africa Matters*, will be published by Yale University Press in early 2008.

Notes

1. See J. Peter Pham, “China's African Strategy and Its Implications for U.S. Interests,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* vol. 28, no. 3 (June 2006): 239–253.

2. See J. Peter Pham, “U.S. National Interests and Africa's Strategic Significance,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* vol. 27, no. 1 (February 2005): 19–29; idem, “Next Front? Evolving U.S.-African Strategic Relations in the ‘War on Terrorism’ and Beyond,” *Comparative Strategy* vol. 26, no. 1 (March 2007): 39–54.

3. See Ashton B. Carter, “America's New Strategic Partner?” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 33–44.

4. C. Raja Mohan, “India and the Balance of Power,” *Foreign Affairs* vol. 85, no. 4 (July/August 2006): 17–18.

5. Basil Davidson, *Africa in History: Themes and Outlines*, rev. ed. (1966; New York, 1995), 78.

6. See Robert G. Gregory, *India and East Africa: A History of Race Relations within the British Empire, 1890–1939* (Oxford, 1971).

7. See Ali A. Mazrui, *Africa's International Relations: The Diplomacy of Dependency and Change* (Boulder, Colorado, 1977), 117–118.

8. Quoted in T. G. Ramamurthi, “Foundations of India's Africa Policy,” *Africa Quarterly* vol. 37, no. 1–2 (1997): 30.

9. See Richard Wright, *The Color Curtain: A Report on the Bandung Conference* (1956; Jackson, Mississippi, 1994).

10. Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 1946, (New Delhi, 1994): 464.

11. See Christopher Andrew and Vasili Mitrokhin, *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York, 2005), 439–444.

12. See Ajay Dubey, "India–Africa State Relations (1972–1997)"; *Africa Quarterly* 37, no. 1–2 (1997): 43–57.

13. See Thomas and Margaret Melady, *Idi Amin Dada: Hitler in Africa* (Kansas City, Kansas, 1977), 70–93. (Thomas Melady was the U.S. ambassador to Uganda from 1972 until 1973, when he persuaded the State Department to close the American embassy in the aftermath of the expulsion of the South Asians.)

14. Salman Haidar, "Focus on Africa: India Gears Up for a More Active Policy," *The Statesman* (July 12, 2007); available at <http://www.thestatesman.net/page.arcview.php?clid=3&id=189853&usrsess=1> (accessed August 1, 2007).

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