



Strategies of India and China in Africa – A comparison

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ABSTRACT

The ever increasing demand by China and India for resources, battle for trade markets and quest for greater influence, so as to enhance their strategic foothold in the continent of Africa, will be a source of competitive friction between the two countries and one of the likely causes of a conflict in the foreseeable future. The relationship between China and Africa has evolved considerably over the last five decades, since the 1955 Bandung Conference. Through the 50s and 60s, China provided unconditional financial and military support to African states in their struggle against colonialism. India's relations with Africa during the latter part of the 20th Century stagnated and over the first decade of the 21st Century, India's foreign policy establishment has endeavoured to overcome much of this diplomatic stagnation.

The demand for resources in both China and India will continue to increase in proportion to their economic growth. It is also clear that these resources are not inexhaustible. Both countries are making serious efforts – diplomatic, economic and military and are exerting to win the battle of influence and resources in Africa. This paper aims to compare the economic, diplomatic and military strategies adopted by India and China in Africa.

KEYWORDS

Strategy, India, China, Africa

Introduction

The continent of Africa is the second largest in the world after Asia and home to 13 % of the world's population. Anthropological discoveries have proved it to be the cradle of humanity. Africa has large reserves of energy and mineral resources, most of which are yet to be untapped. This wealth resulted in a scramble between European colonial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth century for its riches: a scramble which saw the African pie being sliced up into several colonies ruled over by Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium and Italy, the importance of each colony being in direct proportion to the geo-political influence and economic dominance of its colonial master worldwide.

Soon after the demise of colonialism, the continent was caught up in a battle between the Cold War rivals – the US and USSR – in another power struggle for global domination. The start of the new millennium has heralded the beginning of yet another scramble for Africa between the world's major powers, firstly, to acquire the key to open up unhindered access to Africa's wealth of mineral and energy resources, secondly, to exploit its considerable arable land area and fish stocks and, thirdly, to capture its large untapped trade market. Consequently, we are seeing, not just China and India, but also a resurgent Russia as well the United States, which created a new military command – the Africa Command or AFRICOM – to protect its national interests in Africa.

Most African countries are very highly dependent on their production and export of minerals for the survival of their economy. Coal and petroleum account for more than 90% of the export earnings of Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Libya, and Nigeria. Similarly, diamonds contribute 80% of Botswana's GDP. Other mineral dependent countries include the DR Congo (petroleum), Congo (diamond, petroleum, cobalt, and copper), Gabon (petroleum and manganese), Guinea (bauxite, alumina, gold, and diamond), Sierra Leone (diamond), Sudan (petroleum and gold), Mali (gold), Mauritania (iron ore), Mozambique (aluminium), Namibia (diamond, uranium, gold, and zinc) and Zambia (copper and cobalt).¹

Africa's one billion population, the largest after Asia, represents a vast and untapped trade market, especially for rapidly growing economies such as China and India, to sell their goods and services, as well as invest in infrastructure, services and development projects.

China-Africa Diplomatic Relations

The relationship between China and Africa has evolved noticeably over the last five decades, beginning with the watershed Bandung Conference of 1955, which saw the enunciation of the 'Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence' by China for the first time. Through the 50s and much of the 60s, when most African states were seeking financial and even military support from the international community in their independence struggle against colonialism, China emerged as a willing supporter. It provided unconditional assistance, without any strings attached, during this crucial period – except between the years 1966 to 1969 – when there was some stagnation in Chinese foreign policy, due to the domestic turmoil it went through during the Cultural Revolution.²

It also offered buildings, stadiums, factories, infrastructure, medical teams and student exchange programmes to African states, and continued to support African nationalist independence movements, which it saw as the need of these movements to "disentangle themselves from the hegemonic West."³

Following the death of Mao and the rise of Deng Xiaoping, China underwent a dramatic transformation. The cornerstone of Deng's 'Four Modernisations' lay in widespread (some would say, even capitalist!) economic reforms, in order to rapidly develop China. Concurrently, China's foreign policy also witnessed a shift, in promoting its economic development through improved trade relations. This was highlighted during a visit by Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang in December 1982 to 11 African countries, which marked a new era in Sino-African relations. Zhao propounded 'Four Principles' of Chinese cooperation with Africa, of which the principle of **economic development for mutual benefit** was given priority. China's 'New Africa Policy,' adopted by the Chinese government in January 2006, set out four guiding principles in the following terms:-

- Sincerity, friendship and equality.
- Mutual benefit, reciprocity and common prosperity.
- Mutual support and close coordination.
- Learning from each other and seeking common development.⁴

More specifically, President Hu Jintao announced eight measures to strengthen cooperation with Africa⁵ and support African development: providing more aid, establishing a China-Africa Development Fund, cancelling debts, waiving duties, creating economic and trading cooperation districts in African countries,

training African professionals, dispatching agricultural experts, building agricultural centres, hospitals, malaria prevention and treatment centres and schools for Africa. China, with its deep pockets, had obviously decided that it would pull no stops in winning over Africa to its side. The question remains: are Africans themselves willing to be bought over?

1. Economic Cooperation - Economic cooperation between Africa and China can be divided into three components: China's need for energy and mineral resources; markets for its manufactured goods; and investment opportunities for Chinese companies.

Africa is an attractive option for China, due to the oil being of high quality, with low sulphur content and the fact that most of it is found offshore, which is advantageous for loading of tankers and provides some stability in oil production. China is, therefore, seeking to increase its oil imports from the continent. Besides the major suppliers mentioned above, China is also seeking tie ups with Chad, Nigeria, Algeria, and Gabon.⁶

One of the criticisms levelled against China is that it follows an 'ends justifies means' policy in its dealings with African governments. One such example is Angola, whose infrastructure had been almost completely destroyed during its three decades civil war, which ended in 2001. The country had approached the IMF for a loan to reconstruct its economy, but the latter, possibly fearful of corruption and large scale siphoning of oil revenues, demanded that Angola commit to greater financial transparency and accountability and also follow the IMF's stabilisation programme. Consequently, Angola broke off negotiations with the IMF in Mar 2004, stating that its conditions were "humiliating" and announced that China had offered it a \$2 billion line of credit, to be repaid within 12 years at an interest rate of 1.5%. In return, Angola opened up to Chinese oil investments. The oil major, Sinopec acquired its first stake in Angola's oil industry in July 2004 and, since then, has obtained majority equity share in five more Angolan blocks.⁸

Another glaring example is Sudan, which exports a considerable 44% of its oil to China. In fact, China was the first country to commence importing oil from Sudan in 1995, through the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), which is currently the largest shareholder and the main investor in Sudanese oil production. China also bore the major share of building a \$15 billion 932-mile pipeline to Port Sudan. In return, it has initiated \$20 billion worth of development projects including airports, dams, hydroelectric power stations, textile mills and agricultural schemes for Sudan.⁹ China has also supplied a steady stream of arms to Sudan, which the government forces and Janjaweed militia are alleged to have used against civilians in the Darfur conflict.¹⁰ China is a preferred arms supplier since it attaches no political conditions and its weapons are relatively cheap.¹¹

Timber is another magnet drawing the dragon to Africa. Due to strict restrictions imposed by the Chinese government on domestic logging in 1998, China is now the largest importer of forest products in the world. Gabon is China's largest timber trading partner worldwide, supplying 40% of China's imports, followed by Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Liberia. China has, however, shown scant regard for the African ecology in pursuit of its economic goals.¹²

For China, though, Africa is more than just a wellspring of resources. It also represents a growing market for its goods. The number of Chinese traders in Africa increased from about 27,000 in 1949 to 130,000 by 1999. These traders serve as the conduits that flood the African market with cheap Chinese goods such as household utensils, mechanical and electrical items, textiles and garments. The Chinese are able to keep prices low as a result of their low labour costs. Most Africans prefer Chinese goods because they are affordable, even though their quality may be poor compared to equivalent branded Western items. This flood of Chinese goods has, however, undermined local production which

is struggling to compete on a level playing field.¹³

Even prior to the FOCAC summit, the Chinese had provided considerable assistance to African countries. During the Summit, China pledged to double its aid to Africa to \$5 billion for direct investments (\$3 billion in preferential loans, \$2 billion in export credits) by 2009 and increase the number of loans as well as development projects in health and agriculture. It also pledged to train 15,000 Africans, construct 60 hospitals, build 100 new schools and provide increased scholarships for Africans.¹⁴ This aid is not, however, unconditional, but comes with political and economic strings attached. For instance, any country being given aid has to adhere to the 'One China' Policy. The loans provided also demand Chinese access to African resources, repatriation of profits and the use of Chinese labour. The Chinese also offer debt relief, grants, soft loans, buyer credits provided by state owned banks, scholarships, preferential market access and technical aid in medicine, agriculture and engineering to strengthen their grip on the African market.¹⁵

2. Chinese Military Cooperation with Africa - Weapons have always been amongst the major Chinese products exported to Africa. During their struggle for independence, as well as during the Cold War, China supplied African nations with arms to fight colonialism and imperialism. Today, however, the motive behind arms supply has shifted from ideology to promotion of self-interests and is often referred to as an "arms for oil" strategy. China seeks to make certain key African resource (mainly oil) suppliers, who are critical to its economy, dependent on it; and it uses any means available, even if this makes it unpopular with the international community. Just as Africa itself is a large market for Chinese goods, so also do many of the African regimes represent arms markets for an ever increasing amount of military hardware being produced in China. According to the Congressional Research Service, China's arms sales to Africa between 1996 and 2003 made up 10% of all arms transfers to Africa.¹⁶ In many cases, notably Sudan and Zimbabwe, which have earned opprobrium from much of the Western world for their human rights violations and non-adherence to democratic practices, China has been the only major country to openly support these regimes.

China has vociferously defended its military engagement with African nations such as Zimbabwe and Sudan, insisting that it is only contributing to the collective security of the continent and has given an example of its UN Peacekeeping presence to justify its actions. China's contributions of soldiers and police to UN peacekeeping operations have indeed increased ten-fold since 2001 and as of Jun 2010, it was in 14th spot in terms of troop contributions, with 2137 personnel.¹⁷ It may be, however, observed that three-fourths of Chinese peacekeeping forces are supporting UN missions in Africa (DR Congo, Liberia, Sudan, and Darfur) – Lebanon being the one exception. This quite clearly reveals its underlying motives to undertake peacekeeping operations primarily in those regions, which are important to its economic and strategic objectives.

India's Engagement with Africa

1. Diplomatic Relations - Contacts between India and Africa date back to ancient times when Indian merchants conducted extensive trade along the east coast of the African continent. Following the colonisation of India by European powers – and its consequent effect on Indo-African trade – large communities of Indians settled down in Africa. The most prominent of them, of course, was Mahatma Gandhi, who came to Natal as a lawyer in 1893 and remained in South Africa until 1914. Gandhi's struggle against colonialism and imperialism, through the use of non-violence or '*satyagraha*,' began in South Africa. His philosophy would resonate throughout the colonised world and 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.¹⁸ Though Mahatma Gandhi may have been the undisputed moral leader, it was Jawaharlal Nehru who laid the real foundation of India's Africa policy, in which he promised African

states India's full support in their struggle against imperialism, colonialism and racial discrimination.¹⁹

Nehru, along with China's Zhou Enlai, Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, Ghana's Nkrumah, Indonesia's Sukarno, and Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh played a leading role in convening the first Afro-Asian (Bandung Conference) in 1955, which also led to the formation of the Non Aligned Movement (NAM). Seven years later, however, two major convenors of the Conference, India and China, fought a short, but decisive war, which ended in disastrous defeat for India. Possibly as a result of this, India's image as a world leader took a dip amongst the African states, which gravitated towards China. Following the 1962 war, the natural antipathy and adversarial relations that developed between India and China, led to India opposing China at all multilateral fora such as the NAM. India's moral stand that African freedom movements follow peaceful methods to earn their independence from their colonial masters also did not find many supporters, in the face of active economic and military support by China to these nations.²⁰

India did, however, take some important foreign policy initiatives, including a review of its Africa Policy, starting from the mid-1960s. Indira Gandhi, as foreign minister, proceeded on an 'African Safari' in 1964 and launched the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme the same year. The Green Revolution, India's victory in the 1971 war against Pakistan as well as the 1974 Peaceful Nuclear Explosion were three other events that provided a fillip to India's international image and increased its stature in African eyes. In the 1970s and 1980s, India continued to support independence movements financially and their fight to overturn apartheid in South Africa and Namibia. One of its initiatives in this regard was pushing for the establishment of 'The Africa Fund' by NAM under Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's leadership in 1986. It accorded diplomatic status to the African National Congress (ANC) in 1967 and SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation) in 1985.²¹ Despite all its good intentions and initiatives, however, India's relations with Africa during the latter part of the 20th Century did not really take off in diplomatic and economic terms.

Over the first decade of the 21st Century, India's foreign policy establishment has endeavoured to overcome much of this diplomatic stagnation. Firstly, from 2003 onwards, the MEA has increased its staff strength from one joint secretary looking after the entire continent to three joint secretaries managing three regional African divisions. Secondly, India's diplomatic missions in Africa have steadily increased, from only 6 in the 1990s to 25 at the present time. This boost given to India's diplomatic efforts has already paid dividends. For example, today, most African nations as well as regional groupings, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), strongly support India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.²² The Africa-India Forum Summit 2008, while much smaller in scale as compared to the FOCAC, has set in process a series of meetings and dialogues, which are taking the cooperation between India and African nations to an entirely different level.

Despite the positives, there is still plenty of scope for diplomatic interaction, especially in terms of high level visits. For example, the only sub Saharan African leaders to visit India in 2009 and up to Mar 2010 were the President of Namibia and the Prime Minister of Tanzania. Even more surprising, there was not a single state visit by either our President or Prime Minister to Africa during this period, with the only noteworthy visits being that of the Vice President to South Africa in May 2009 and Zambia, Malawi and Botswana in Jan 2010 respectively.²³

2. Economic Cooperation and Assistance - While the Middle East remains India's primary regional source, supplying nearly 70% of our imports, it has seen much volatility, especially in the past three decades, as a result of wars and political crises. Oil prices have invariably risen steeply whenever a disruptive event, such as the Gulf War, has occurred. Consequently, India is making assiduous efforts to diversify its sources of supply and Africa, which

is our second largest regional supplier at 30%, is the obvious best bet.

India has also striven for better economic integration with the different regions of Africa. It has established the India-SADC (Southern African Development Community) Forum that links India with 14 countries from Southern Africa and has dialogues with the 15-nation ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), 20-member COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern African Countries), 11-member Economic Community for Central African States (ECCAS) and the Eastern African Community (EAC).²⁴

Apart from economic ventures, India has also been at the forefront in providing humanitarian assistance to African countries, in response to emergencies and natural disasters. Some notable examples include sending food grains to Chad and Guinea, medical supplies to Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Niger and Gambia, and pumps, tents and other relief material to Senegal.²⁵

India has one more asset in Africa – its diaspora. It is estimated that there are about one lakh Indian citizens in Africa, as well as more than one million people of Indian origin who have settled in Africa for many generations. Unlike Chinese construction workers whose arrival caused much resentment, Indian communities are fully integrated and can often serve Indian interests as and when required.²⁶

Comparison of Strategies

1. Diplomatic Strategies - There is no doubt that the diplomatic efforts of China, in cultivating Africa over the years, have been far more visible and high profile than those of India, which prefers to adopt a low key approach. The comparison between the FOCAC Beijing Summit of 2006 and the Africa India Forum Summit of 2008 is perhaps the best example. But this is more than simply a matter of rhetoric and media glare. It is revealing that the top leadership of China, comprising President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao and Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing visited as many as 15 countries in Africa during 2006, prior to the FOCAC Summit.²⁷ After the Summit, President Hu Jintao followed up with a tour to eight African nations – Cameroon, Liberia, Sudan, Zambia, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and Seychelles – during Jan-Feb 2007. China also believes in laying out the red carpet for African leaders visiting their country, which, this year, includes the Presidents of Zambia, Kenya and South Africa; and the Prime Minister of Mozambique. Last, but not least, Chinese foreign ministers make it a point to make Africa the first stop on their list of overseas visits at the beginning of each calendar year.

India on the other hand is seen to be trailing China by a considerable margin in the number of diplomatic missions²⁸ to Africa. India's 25 missions compare poorly with China's 41 missions.²⁹ This ratio is further skewed in East and Central Africa where, in 2006, India had just 6 poorly staffed missions in comparison to China's 25 well manned ones.³⁰ There is also a difference in the breadth and scale of India's diplomatic engagement. While China has been cultivating all African countries, including those which are relatively less important, with an eye on its long term interests, India – thus far – has demonstrated a somewhat myopic foreign policy vision, wherein it is focussing mostly on countries which are providing us the major share of resources, trade markets, investments and agricultural land.

The one area where India may enjoy an advantage is in the goodwill that most Africans bear towards us. China is often seen as having no moral scruples, willing to do business with just about anyone and everyone, even if he happens to be a dictator and a despot. This has won them few friends, not just in the international community, but also amongst the majority of African leaders and people; and led to public condemnation by organisations such as Amnesty International. India's approach, on the other hand, is far more 'Africa friendly.'

2. Economic Strategies - In the economic sphere, China again an

edge over India with projects worth \$8 billion compared with India's approximate \$2 billion worth of investments. China's pockets are also much deeper than India's in offering aid and assistance. While India has extended \$ 2 billion in Lines of Credit for all African nations, China has pledged over \$ 4 billion in Angola, Sudan and Nigeria alone.³²

China looms most prominently and face to face with India, in the oil sector. Though OVL, in particular, has had some success in acquiring oil blocks, in the majority of cases, Chinese oil companies have been able to win contracts by committing huge amounts of aid – both financial and military – to the host nation in what has been commonly referred to as the 'bidding wars.'

India's core strengths are IT, telecommunications and pharmaceuticals, where it has risen to the position of a world leader. These can be leveraged in Africa, which is still facing major development challenges. Furthermore, as brought out earlier, many Chinese aggressive and even unethical business practices do not endear themselves to their African partners. On the other hand, India's slower 'inclusive growth' approach, of which the Pan African E-Network and the ITEC programme are two shining examples, stimulates local productivity and builds local capacity³³ and is genuinely appreciated by the Africans.

3. Military Strategies - Just as in the diplomatic and economic sphere, India is some way behind China in using military diplomacy as an effective tool of foreign policy. The most glaring difference is in arms sales. China, as a major arms supplier, has blatantly, but effectively, used arms to 'sweeten' several deals, in return for raw materials and energy resources. India's efforts, in comparison, have been minuscule.

There are, however, two advantages that India has always had with respect to China – standardisation of English as the universal training medium, and a common military structure with Commonwealth African nations bequeathed us by our erstwhile colonial rulers. India also has an advantage in terms of maritime cooperation, since it has already established a presence in the East and Southern African littoral in terms of naval deployments and combined exercises.

India's military presence in Africa since the 1950s in the form of UN Peacekeeping forces as well as military training teams has given it a lead that we cannot afford to lose. Though China started contributing troops for UNPKO from 1990, it was only from 1999 that its participation became more active.³⁴ It is not just a matter of coincidence that this is the time when its economic interests in Africa became a national priority. India still has more UN peacekeepers than China³⁵ and its efforts in UNPKO have been appreciated around the world.

Potential Areas for Competition and Conflict

The Indian government has repeatedly stated that India is not in competition with China in Africa, but there is no gainsaying the fact that China is undoubtedly India's foremost rival in the continent.³⁶ Though China has established a clear lead, there are signs that the Indian tortoise may eventually overtake the Chinese hare. Western, Indian and Chinese commentators may have some residual bias, but the independent views of African commentators are perhaps the most interesting – and important. One such view is that, "... India may eventually surpass China's economic progress, thanks at least in part, to a **freer political and intellectual culture**. As the largest democracy in the world with long standing ties to Africa, India's economic progress in the last decade especially the **exponential growth of its ICT industries** could serve as an 'alternate' model to China."³⁷ If and when that happens, it would be interesting to see China's reactions. Going by certain indicators at the present time, it is unlikely that China would give up its position of primacy without confronting India head on. Perhaps the best example of this increasing Chinese assertiveness can be discerned in the South China Sea, which it now claims to be its 'core national interests.' In the past China has even had military clashes with Vietnam and the Philippines over

the occupation of isolated reefs in the Spratleys and is now taking on the world's maritime community over their right to freedom of navigation in these waters, as per the UNCLOS (India is one of 11 nations which has challenged this assertion).

The increasing demand for oil will force both countries to compete for more fields in Africa. India's entry into countries where China established an early presence, such as Sudan, met with vigorous opposition from established Chinese oil companies. Instead of always being on opposite sides, India and China could look at the option of joint bidding for oil blocks which, among other benefits, could facilitate acquiring the blocks at a better price.

It is the Indian Ocean which makes Africa and India close maritime neighbours. India is, therefore, uncomfortable with the growing Chinese presence in these waters. China is also providing assistance to Indian Ocean island nations like Mauritius and Seychelles. If India has to avoid giving up its geostrategic advantage, it has to make concerted efforts to retain its influence in these Western Indian Ocean nations, one of which Mauritius, has a majority population of Persons of Indian Origin.

China is also fretful about the security of its Sea Lines of Communication carrying its oil and trade through the Indian Ocean. India enjoys a tremendous geostrategic advantage, lying smack in the middle of Chinese SLOCs, originating from both the Gulf, as well as the Cape of Good Hope. It is widely believed that China has developed the port of Gwadar in Pakistan, from where a pipeline may ultimately take Chinese oil directly to Xinjiang, to circumvent any Indian design to interfere with its SLOCs. The continuous deployment of a Chinese naval task group for anti-piracy missions in the Gulf of Aden since 2009 is also an indicator that the PLA Navy sees a greater role for itself than only coastal defence and is increasingly making forays far from its shores.

Conclusion

India seems to be moving along in a generally parallel direction with China, whether it is in establishing economic presence on the continent in terms of acquiring oil assets, increasing bilateral aid and investments, enhancing our diplomatic signature and forging new military cooperation linkages. There are some significant differences though in the approaches. China has gone ahead with a very proactive, high visibility, approach – but also one that has not always been appreciated by the Africans themselves, since it has not resulted in any human resource development of the local community. India's approach, while much slower, is much more inclusive and does not see us as a neo-colonialist, bent only on grabbing resources without much regard to the environment. This approach, since the beginning of the new millennium, has seen India emerge as a major player in the continent.

China is well ahead of India in all three spheres – diplomatic, economic and military and it would be naïve to assume that India would be able to catch up, let alone overtake her in the near future. The Pan African E-Network is yet another symbol of India's commitment to help Africa in capacity building. More than Government initiatives, however, it may finally be the power of Indian private entrepreneurship which may finally swing the pendulum our way – even if this shift is imperceptible to start with. One of the indicators of these shifts is the fact that, not only an overwhelming majority of the 53 African Union states, but also sub regional groups like SADC and ECOWAS, have endorsed India's candidature for permanent membership of the UN Security Council.

It would also be simplistic to believe that this is only a rivalry between us and China in the continent. There are many other major players who are watching the situation unfold with keen interest. The United States can, scarcely, be left out when debating any matter of international relations. Its creation of the Africa Command has, indeed, demonstrated how much importance it is now giving this continent – not perhaps, because it has any immediate concerns regarding its resource security, but more to protect its long term interest especially since China is also

emerging as its primary challenger for global domination.

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