

INDIA'S ENGAGEMENTS IN NORTH AFRICA: CAN IT MATCH CHINESE INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION?

ANALYSIS



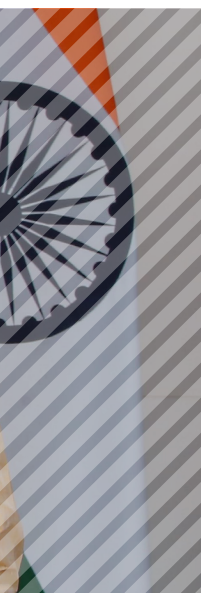
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8 NOVEMBER 2021



Contents

ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION	4
LOCATING NORTH AFRICA IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY OUTLOOK	5
TEMPORAL AND THEMATIC ASPECTS OF INDIA — NORTH AFRICA RELATIONS	8
THEMATIC DEVELOPMENTS	10
THE CHINA FACTOR	14
CONCLUSION	19
ENDNOTES	20
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	26
AL SHARQ STRATEGIC RESEARCH	26



INDIA'S ENGAGEMENTS IN NORTH AFRICA: CAN IT MATCH CHINESE INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGION?

Abstract: India's foreign policy initiatives and strategy in North Africa has so far remained an under-researched topic. This paper maps out India's engagement with the five North African nations: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria, taking a chronological and thematic approach. At the same time, it provides an understanding of China's engagement in the region, facilitating a comparative study of the two nations' activities in the region and how their respective relations with North Africa have developed.

Introduction

India's engagement with the African continent has increasingly deepened in recent decades. While research has so far mostly focused on India's ties with other parts of Africa,¹ its relations with North Africa (referring to Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria) are also gaining momentum and merit a more detailed examination. This paper, therefore, looks at India's engagement in North Africa by drawing on various primary and secondary sources.

It begins by providing an understanding of where North Africa stands in India's foreign policy ambitions given its strategic location at the cross-section of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East. The paper then explains India's standing in North Africa by taking a chronological and thematic approach to its engagement. Due to China's importance in North Africa, it also provides a comparative perspective on India and China's activities in the region, acting as a segue to explain how India is perceived in the region before concluding the paper.

Primarily, this paper argues that there is much potential for India and North African relations to expand in the backdrop of a post-pandemic world. This potential lies in different domains such as increasing tourism and business while also helping mitigate the effects of climate change. They can also be facilitated with the help of European countries and other nations invested in seeing North Africa succeed. This paper is meant to be a reference point for stakeholders interested in understanding India – North Africa dynamics.

Locating North Africa in India's Foreign Policy Outlook

North Africa is geographically far from India compared to regions such as South Asia, West Asia/Middle East, and Central Asia. Nevertheless, the region and the countries contain immense potential for India, not just because of their individual appeal, but due to their linkages with the other three regions.

First, Egypt, the region's easternmost country, is intimately connected to the politics of West Asia/Middle East. Traditionally, it has been a power broker in the Middle East over the last century and while its position of power has diminished over the last few decades, it has reassumed some more importance recently given its alignment with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which were all part of the coalition that sanctioned Qatar in 2017. Moreover, it has also involved itself in Libya by supporting the military general Khalifa Haftar against the UN-backed government. Lastly, its geographical proximity to Israel placed it in a central role in the Abraham accords of 2021 that led to the normalization of relations between Israel and some Arab nations.²

Such diplomatic heft is important for India which has often had to manoeuvre through the Middle East's different conflicts such as the rift among members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi, Egypt, UAE, Bahrain Vs Qatar), the Israeli-Palestine conflict and others. Encouraging strong relations with Egypt allows for India to negotiate with it and other Middle Eastern powers to pursue its own ambitions in times of heightened regional tensions.³ Thus, these factors make Egypt an important ally for extending India's ambitions in the Middle East.

Second, North Africa serves as an additional gateway to the entire African continent for India. Given that countries like Morocco have had relatively stable political environments, they are ideal for conducting business. Thus, Indian companies and investment in these nations have ballooned whereby Indian firms have pursued joint ventures with different nations in the region.⁴ For instance, in Egypt alone, about 52 Indian companies operate.⁵ Moreover, such nations are also important for connecting India to other parts of Africa in trade, air travel, and electronic infrastructure.⁶ Indeed Morocco has expressed its desire to be the connecting link between India and the rest of Francophone Africa.⁷

An example of this connectivity was seen during operation Raahat, in which the Indian government evacuated Indian citizens from Yemen in 2015.⁸ Djibouti, which was used as a connecting location for the evacuation, had no Indian diplomatic presence, necessitating Indian ambassadors from Egypt to come to help coordinate the evacuation efforts in the nation.⁹ Similar instances in trade and oil and gas investments serve as periodical reminders of North Africa's importance as a link to the rest of the African continent.

Finally, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya are all important nations for European countries and therefore have the potential to boost India's foreign policy ambitions even in the European continent.¹⁰ As such, India's engagement with these nations is also intertwined with many European nations' goals in the continent and specifically in North Africa which is the closest in proximity to Europe. For example, both India and European nations are invested in ensuring the maritime security of global trade routes such as the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz (trade routes which carry essential goods for all countries involved) which happen to line Africa's coasts. Both parties are also interested in addressing climate change and realizing the potential of African nations' large trove of available natural resources.¹¹

Accordingly, India's ambitions in North Africa supplement its overall goal of becoming a regional superpower in Asia and a significant global player. One of the most important aspects of this goal is the support of North African and other African nations for its candidacy as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), an ambition it has long harboured.¹² This also stems from India's desire to counter Chinese influence globally and in Africa specifically due to the latter's immense strength in the Security Council.

In this regard, India has often voiced support for restructuring the United Nations and particularly the Security Council, where it has repeatedly called for more African representation as well.¹³ This has met positive reception among African nations and resulted in India winning many of their votes for its bid as a non-permanent member of the UNSC, the 2021 – 2022 period being India's most recent candidature.¹⁴

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Reasons for weaker relations

Despite the region's growing importance for India, it is also important to note that North Africa was not always in the Indian foreign policy spotlight for much of the 20th century and has only assumed importance over the last few decades.

A few broader factors contributed to this. First, the Indian foreign policy establishment in the first few decades after its independence was fixated on its immediate neighbours in South Asia, which it considered as India's dominion as seen in the Indira doctrine.¹⁵ Second, at least till the 1990s, India was a far more inward-looking economy, which also guided its foreign policy directions and made it more interested in its immediate neighbours in South Asia and parts of Southeast Asia.¹⁶ Apart from that, it was also a lot more focused on the superpowers of United States (US) and the Soviet Union. Against this backdrop, there was not much space for it to focus on African and Middle Eastern countries.¹⁷

Third, many of its dealings with Arab and Muslim African countries were guided by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The fact that India was seen as a non-Muslim nation oppressing Muslim Kashmir, an agenda heavily pushed by Pakistan, presumably made it more difficult for it to set up great relations with different North African countries.

Lastly, since India's ambitions to become a regional and eventually global superpower have only received a boost over the last few decades, it has only recently begun to establish stronger relations with nations once considered at the periphery of its foreign policy.¹⁸ These could explain why North Africa is only now receiving increasing attention from India.¹⁹

Common Interests

There are very few resources that outline a coherent Indian strategy towards the five North African countries. As such, a guiding principle that analysts can use to gauge India's engagement in North Africa would be Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech to the Ugandan parliament in 2018. Outlining India's visions for Africa, he noted that the continent would be India's top priority in its foreign engagement, emphasizing the importance of developing local capacity, youth, agriculture, and industry as well as combating climate change, terrorism, and North-South inequality.²⁰ These principles are also applicable to North Africa.

In this regard, it is important to note some thematic evolutions of bilateral and multilateral ties between India and the North African nations, which we will turn to in the next section.

Temporal and thematic aspects of India – North Africa relations

Mapping India's evolving strategies in North Africa

India's modern-day relations with Africa were born out of its role in fighting the British for independence, which served as an inspiration for many African nations.²¹ Accordingly, India also emphasized this with its calls for Africa's decolonization as part of South-South cooperation.²² This was also due to India's foreign policy being guided by its then Prime Minister Nehru whose ideology of decolonization heavily influenced India's foreign policy and led India to support anti- colonial movements across the globe.

The result was seen in North Africa, where Nehru, along with Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser and Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, helped form the Non-Aligned Movement to stay out of the US – USSR cold war.²³ Furthermore, all the North African countries were members of this movement.²⁴ These ideological ties were also seen with India supporting Tunisia²⁵ and Algeria's²⁶ independence/decolonization, thus setting up India's image as a positive force for liberation. Indeed, Nehru was known to be a major role model for Gaddafi due to the former's spirit of freedom for the third world.²⁷ Diplomatic relations were also set up with these nations shortly after India's independence (see table 1 below).

Country	Date
Egypt	1948
Morocco	1957
Tunisia	1958
Algeria	1962
Libya	1969

Table 1: *Establishment of Diplomatic relations between India and North African nations*

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Indian foreign policy took a slightly different turn after Nehru's death as India slowly but steadily took a more pragmatic approach.²⁸ As part of this outreach, India began to increase diplomatic exchanges with then PM Indira Gandhi visiting Egypt (1967),²⁹ Algeria (1973),³⁰ Tunisia, and Libya (1984).³¹ Yet at this point, India still kept its ideological rhetoric of South-South Cooperation as the basis for expanding its relationship with these nations.

It was in the 1990s that India's foreign policy took another turn.³² The fall of the Soviet Union, one of India's most significant trade partners,³³ along with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait led to a Balance of Payment (BoP) deficit in India pushing it to engage in intense economic and foreign policy reforms.³⁴ Thus, India now moved closer to the US and its allies, including nations like Egypt, while also shifting to an economically liberalized model with reduced intervention.³⁵

The economic consequences of this for India–North Africa relations began to mature over a decade into the 2000s. As a result of India's growing private sector, different Indian companies such as Reliance Ltd., Mahindra and Mahindra, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Mission Viva Care and Projects and Development India Ltd among others began to invest in sectors in North Africa such as oil, gas, textiles, energy, cosmetics, automobiles, pharmaceuticals, etc.³⁶ This was also buttressed by the high-level diplomatic visits between India and the five North African countries in the previous decades leading to various bilateral trade agreements.³⁷ For instance, in Morocco, India inked pacts on counter-terrorism, security, investments, and youth. Similarly, as can be seen throughout this paper, India has inked many deals with nations like Egypt and Algeria on issues such as trade, terrorism, tourism, and investments. It also conducted workshops with Egypt on Counter Terrorism and agreed to share best practises and arrange for delegations to exchange expertise on tourism and agriculture.

Interestingly, despite Indian PM Modi's (2014 – present) penchant for personally visiting different countries, among the North African countries, he has only visited Egypt.³⁸ This could be due to Egypt's standing in the Middle East which is far more important as

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opposed to the other four nations in North Africa. Nonetheless, Indian co-operation with the North African nations can be categorized into four major aspects: diplomatic, economic, military, and technical.

Thematic Developments

Economic

A brief look at India's trade ties with North African nations reveals that not only is its volume of trade low compared to its other partners such as the UAE (\$60 billion 2019),³⁹ but the volumes have also not drastically increased over time, dropping in the case of Tunisia and Libya and only increasing marginally in Algeria. It is only in Egypt and Morocco that India has seen growth, adding \$1 billion over ten years (See table 2 below).

Indian investments in North Africa are not value-driven, but rather follow a more calculated approach depending on the economic benefits of doing business. For example, India's trade and engagement with some countries such as Tunisia has declined despite glowing opinions about the state of democracy in the country (pre 2021).⁴⁰ Meanwhile Indian trade with Egypt has improved over time despite increasing signs of autocratization.

Countries	2010	2019/2020	Export Items	Import Items
Egypt	\$3.5 bn ⁴¹	\$4.53 bn ⁴²	Petroleum Products, Cotton Yarn, Motor Vehicle/Cars, Processed Minerals, and Buffalo Meat	Crude Petroleum, Manufactured Fertilizers, Inorganic Chemicals, and Crude Fertilizers
Libya	\$0.68 bn ⁴³	\$0.28 bn ⁴⁴	Electrical equipment, Machinery, Mechanical Appliances, Vehicles, parts of turbines, Boilers, Iron & Steel articles, Project goods, drugs, and pharmaceuticals	Mineral fuels, Mineral oils, Products of their distillation, bituminous substances, mineral waxes
Tunisia	\$0.58 bn ⁴⁵	\$0.46 bn ⁴⁶	Di-Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) and Phosphoric Acid	mobile telephones, earth moving equipment, machinery, articles of iron and steel, marine products, sugar, tea, pulses, raw tobacco, finished leather, fine chemicals, polyethylene and yarn

Algeria	\$2.3 bn ⁴⁷	\$2.40 bn ⁴⁸	Oil, gas, lubricants, and phosphate.	chickpeas, milk powder, rice, spices, Automobiles spare parts, agricultural and industrial machinery, and equipment (Tractors and Transformers), pharmaceuticals, mobile phones, and cosmetic products
Morocco	\$1.2 bn ⁴⁹	\$2.19 bn ⁵⁰	metallic ores and metal scrap, semi-finished products and inorganic chemicals	cotton yarn, synthetic fibre, transport equipment, pharmaceuticals, agricultural implements, chemicals, spices, and manufactured metals.
Total	\$8.26 bn	\$9.86 bn		

Table 2: India's trade with North African Countries including contents of trade.

Country	Indian Exports (\$)	Indian Imports (\$)	Surplus/Deficit (\$)
Egypt	2.76 Billion	1.85 Billion	+ 0.91 Billion
Libya	0.19 Million	0.07 Billion	+0.12 Billion
Tunisia	0.32 Million	0.11 Billion	+ 0.21 Billion
Algeria	0.74 Million	1.77 Billion	- 1.03 Billion
Morocco	1.05 Billion	1.12 Billion	- 0.07 Billion
Total	5.06 Billion	4.92 Billion	+ 0.14 Billion

Table 3: Breakdown of India's Imports and Exports to North African nations in the year 2019. ⁵¹

India's most important import from North African countries is phosphate, a key ingredient for its agriculture sector, maintaining its soil's fertility and producing better quality crops. Apart from a few other countries outside of the region, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco are a main source for this mineral, providing more than 50% of India's phosphate requirement.⁵² In all, as Table 3 demonstrates, India had a trade surplus with the North African nations in 2019 (the most updated year). The margin of the trade surplus however, was quite thin with a total of just 140 Million dollars in favour of India. This is partly due to the massive amount of Phosphoric Acid that it imported from these nations contributing to a trade deficit in Morocco. Another factor is the large amount of crude petroleum that it imported from Algeria (the other country with which it holds a trade deficit).⁵³

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Defence and Counter-Terrorism

In terms of defence, India's outreach has been limited in North Africa. Apart from Libya and Algeria sending a delegation to India's defence show in 2013 and 2017,⁵⁴ there was not much to show in the case of the other countries until the late 2010s. It was only recently that India signed various defence agreements with Morocco (2020).⁵⁵ An exception in this regard has been Egypt, with whom India has long coordinated military training and exercises as well as produced military vehicles for.⁵⁶ All of these cooperations were further enhanced after several high-level meetings in 2015 and 2016 between officials from both countries.

Such agreements also spilled over into Counter-Terrorism (CT), another important indicator of increasing hard power ties. For instance, India has signed a counter-terrorism Memoranda of Understanding with Egypt⁵⁷, which increased its commitments compared to its previous CT cooperation by agreeing to share intelligence and prevent youth radicalization in 2016. It also signed a Memoranda of Understanding with Morocco, creating a Joint Working Group on Countering Terrorism to develop comprehensive approaches to counter both physical and digital terrorism in February 2019).⁵⁸ Over time, given how India has increasingly pursued such ends over the last decade, it is likely that this trend will further rise, especially after the world adequately addresses the Covid-19 pandemic.

Miscellaneous Cooperation as Soft Power

In addition to India's use of hard power, (economic and military incentives and sanctions to influence countries' behaviour) via its trade initiatives and joint military activities, it is important to analyse India's soft power engagement with the North African nations. Humanitarian aid, educational scholarships, Bollywood, and diaspora presence all come under the category of soft power.⁵⁹

India has often sent medical and emergency aid to different nations such as Libya which received more than \$ 2 million in the early 2010s. First, it provided \$1 million in cash in late 2011 to Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) for reconstruction efforts after Gaddafi's

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fall and later supplied \$1 million in medical supplies to the NTC as humanitarian aid.⁶⁰ Most recently, India's humanitarian aid was also seen in the Vaccine Maitri programme, in which it sent Covid-19 vaccines to 80 different nations including most of North Africa.⁶¹

India also provides educational scholarships to many nationals from Egypt,⁶² Morocco,⁶³ Tunisia,⁶⁴ and Algeria,⁶⁵ with students sometimes numbering in the hundreds for some of these countries. Such scholarships have always been of immense importance in increasing India's standing among different nations. Arab students studying in India often act as facilitators for other interested students. At the same time, they also pave the way for bringing their own culture into India as seen in the mushrooming of various Arab cafes and restaurants in metropolitan cities such as Bangalore and Hyderabad. All of this leads to a deepening exchange of values and ties on a people-to-people level also translating to country-level ties if provided enough time.

Another non-commercial export by India to the North African nations is the popularity of Bollywood in these nations. Bollywood cinema, arguably one of India's most important and widespread cultural exports, has also gained much currency in North Africa, with Algeria even making a documentary on the importance of some Bollywood movies in the nation.⁶⁶

Moreover, film stars like Shah Rukh Khan, Aishwarya Rai, and others also have huge fan followings in nations like Egypt⁶⁷ and Morocco demonstrating the huge potential for further economic opportunities. These arise by not just showing these movies in local cinemas, but also shooting in locations such as Tunisia and Algeria some of which have invited India to film more movies in their country.⁶⁸ This cultural affinity is recognized at the diplomatic levels with embassies in each of these countries often organizing Bollywood-themed events across the nation.⁶⁹

India does not have a large diaspora in any of these nations except for a few thousand who reside in Libya as doctors and nurses. Due to their status as medical frontline workers, they are often highly respected in Libya.⁷⁰ Thus, in these ways, India has positioned itself as a benefactor of these nations, a limited but essential way to increase its positive perception in these nations.

While some scholars⁷¹ have discounted the effects of soft power, it is nonetheless an important component of foreign policy. As such, India has previously benefitted by portraying its status as the world's largest democracy (much touted by US policymakers in the Indo-US nuclear deal of 2008).⁷²

The China Factor

Despite India's gradually increasing footprint in the North African region and the entire African continent, its achievements and activities are dwarfed by the presence of China, which has taken an active role in the continent since the late 20th century.⁷³ Similar to India, while Chinese interests in the region initially focused on South-South solidarity, it has recently shifted to a calculative approach of consolidating its power across the region. Chinese economic exchanges began to be coveted even further after the 2008 economic crisis when Africa's natural trade partners in Europe were beset with major economic strife.⁷⁴

Since 2013, China's interest in Africa experienced a further upswing since it announced its ambitious Belt and Road infrastructure project which intends to create new trade routes that tie together some close to 80 different countries. In Africa, this initiative further supplemented its past projects such as telecom and data infrastructure across the continent which China had been investing in for years.⁷⁵ Moreover, US isolationism under previous president Trump created a power vacuum in the continent which allowed China to step in as a security provider and led to developments in defence and maritime issues.⁷⁶

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Specifically, in North Africa, China has signed BRI-related treaties in the five relevant nations.⁷⁷ Moreover, its activities with Egypt and Algeria have been increasing manifold with Chinese construction companies often snatching up contracts in the countries. In Morocco and Tunisia, where engagement is also high, even Chinese tourists have flocked, which has also led to the emergence of Chinese cultural products such as restaurants and other entertainment centres.⁷⁸

North Africa's attraction for China lies in it being at the cusp of the Mediterranean, the African continent, the European Union, and the US. While this is similar to India's own interests in the region, China's ambitious BRI project increases North Africa's importance as a major connectivity hub. Furthermore, the US military did not like the fact that Beijing may want to develop additional military bases in parts of Africa,⁷⁹ after it inaugurated its first one in Djibouti in 2017 to support anti-piracy missions.⁸⁰ Given China's extensive military outreach in North Africa including a number of arms sales,⁸¹ it is plausible that it would also plan for a base in North Africa (though certainly not for anti-piracy purposes).

China's engagement there is quite significant, eclipsing Indian investments by almost three to four times in economic terms (depending on different parameters). Moreover, Chinese engagement is often vaunted due to its influence via the UNSC, its deep pockets, and its tendency to remain neutral in various regional and domestic conflicts (including turning a blind eye to authoritarian powers). In contrast, India does not have the same influence due to its lack of permanency at the UNSC, its inability to spend as much in the region and the time it takes for it to carry out its construction activities in comparison.

Countries	India	China
Africa in total (2017-2018)	\$67 bn	\$185 bn
Egypt (2019)	\$4.53bn ⁸²	\$12.8 bn ⁸³
Libya (2019)	\$0.28 bn ⁸⁴	\$6.66 bn ⁸⁵
Tunisia (2019)	\$0.46 bn ⁸⁶	\$1.77 bn ⁸⁷
Algeria (2019)	\$2.40 bn ⁸⁸	\$7.97 bn ⁸⁹
Morocco (2019)	\$2.19 bn ⁹⁰	\$4.95 bn ⁹¹
Total North Africa	\$9.86 bn	\$34.55 bn

Table 3: Comparing India and China's trade with Africa and North African countries

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As can be seen in the table above, Chinese investments in North Africa dwarf India's investments almost four times over. Things are not all rosy for the Chinese in North Africa though. Like in many other parts of the world, Chinese money comes with its own challenges. As the example of Sri Lanka has shown, Chinese presence often sparks discussions of it having pushed smaller countries into levels of debt that allows it to take control of strategic assets (in the case of Sri Lanka, the Hambentota port in Sri Lanka that oversees significant maritime trade).⁹² Such problems can easily occur in North Africa too as its nations are often desperate for increasing engagement.

For instance, China has planned to inject up to \$18 billion of loans and development assistance into Egypt.⁹³ Similarly, it has maintained about ten different construction projects in Algeria, each ranging from \$50–300 million per project. In Tunisia too, Chinese aid and loans have reached more than \$100 million in the last decade. This is against a backdrop of other African nations such as Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and others who are already saddled with crippling debt.⁹⁴ North African nations aggressively seeking Chinese loans will thus have to watch out for any discrepancies/ opaque conditions in money streaming from China if they want to avoid any sort of debt-trap diplomacy.

Moreover, China has often subtly introduced its own versions of intelligence gathering often to the detriment of other nations. For instance, in 2018, the French newspaper Le Monde reported that China was stealing massive loads of sensitive data from the African Union headquarters in Ethiopia.⁹⁵ With the construction of 186 government buildings across Africa and 14 sensitive intragovernmental communication networks across the continent, such instances may also occur in North Africa as well.⁹⁶

Another issue that North African nations also encounter is the fact that Chinese companies do not create local jobs, but bring their own workers. For instance, Algeria is home to 40,000 Chinese workers.⁹⁷ In many instances, such a large influx of Chinese citizens who disrespect

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prevailing work attitudes disrupts local dynamics and creates further challenges for the North African nations to contend with. This is not keeping in mind reports of corruption, lack of transparency, withholding of salaries and shoddy work carried out in places like Morocco and Algeria.⁹⁸

In this regard, India holds an advantage over China due to its tamer and more positive approach to the region. Its emphasis on developing local industries, agriculture, and youth in Africa⁹⁹ all bode positively for North Africa. India's praise in North African media, both for its positive role in decolonization as well as due to its cultural imports, provide it with a strong base upon which to build its relationship in North Africa.

Another important factor that works in India's favour in comparison to China is its own burgeoning relations with nations in Europe and the US over the last few decades.¹⁰⁰ This is complimented by the fact that it is often seen as an ally and countervailing factor against Chinese domination in Asia¹⁰¹ providing it with currency and potential to work jointly with the Western powers in North Africa.

Evidence of such prospering ties between Europe and India was seen in the recent India – European Union Dialogue that took place in May 2021. Among the many things they declared at the dialogue's conclusion, co-operation in Africa in matters of energy, people-to-people connections, democratic transitions, and connectivity was quite notable.¹⁰² Such co-operation was not just done to benefit each other, but to also curtail Chinese influence, further cementing the idea that Indo-European cooperation is something that will enhance India's image in Africa.

That is not to say that there are no problems associated with India's presence in North Africa. Conceptually speaking, India has not yet differentiated its contribution to Africa distinctly from other actors such as China and Western nations. Specifically, it has not outlined its exact

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vision (especially for North Africa) and its own advantage over other big players such as China. This is further worsened by India's apparent lack of a planned strategy for expanding in North Africa (and even other parts of Africa).

In addition, a few bad business practices also seem to characterize India's presence in the region. For instance, Indian businesses are known to be corrupt and also end up severely delaying constructions abroad. An example of this was the Chabahar port in Iran, which despite its extreme geo-political importance, was delayed for years due to funding issues eventually leading Iran to drop India from the project.¹⁰³ Moreover, Indian businesses in African nations such as Ethiopia have also been accused of indulging in land grabbing, bad environmental practises and exporting food from African nations despite the severe food shortages in these nations.¹⁰⁴ These are also possible issues in North Africa that could create problems for India's presence in the region. Moreover, India also faces constraints from its obvious lack of capital (as compared to China) thus, negatively impacting its presence in North Africa.

Thus, India's image in North Africa has developed in different dimensions. First, by virtue of its engagements being dependent on humanitarian aid, Bollywood, business interests, and diaspora. This is an absolute measure that has grown over the decades although the sentiments cannot be measured. Second, India's perception in the region is also formed in relation to Chinese activities. While much of this remains to be explored, it is entirely plausible that India's presence in these countries, underpinned by historical interpersonal and cultural ties, could vie with China's more aggressive approach for goodwill among North African citizens. This is of course subject to the many issues associated with Indian firms that also need to be tackled.

Yet, there should be no qualms about the fact that deep pockets often have a much more seductive allure than soft power alone and this factor will dictate whether it is India or China that makes more inroads in the continent.

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Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated North Africa's importance for India's rise as a global power. This comes about due to its relevance for India and its location at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East and Europe. Seemingly, no cogent framework seems to have been adopted at the Indian administrative level or by the five nations (jointly) to further such relations. Much can be done by the Indian government to increase its soft power and hard power in the North African nations through concerted actions undertaken by its foreign policy establishment.

As such, India–North Africa relations hold great potential and are often under-researched due to interest in broader India-Middle East/ India-Africa relations. However, the history, current ambitions, and vast amounts of expertise and resources that are present in these dealings can bring about many benefits if the countries take care to increase their engagement.

At the same time, Chinese engagement in these nations has proven to be much more extensive than India's own. However, there also a range of problems associated with its dealings in North Africa, a trend which also has been witnessed in other parts of the world. Accordingly, India-North Africa dealings are not just in the interests of the six nations themselves, but also in the interests of various other African nations for whom North Africa can become a facilitator of better Indo-African ties. As India's global influence and ambitions grow stronger, there are more chances that the nation will increasingly assert its presence in the North Africa region. Whether the countries involved are up for the upcoming challenge is yet to be seen though.

Endnotes

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