

Oceanic groupings of Africa and India: Contemporary and common perspectives

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Abstract

The oceanic groupings of Africa and India are spaces that are focused towards decolonisation and cooperation with other nations from the global south. These regions are not only important from a strategic standpoint but also assist in fostering economic cooperation on a national, regional, continental, or indeed global platform. These oceanic groupings also serve as a platform for dialogue about trade facilitation, sustainable utilisation of natural and human resources, securitisation of economic and human assets from pirates, blue economy, open regionalism practises, regionalisation of opportunities and investments, and restricting the extractive developmental model and neo colonisation practises by the humanitarian approach that India represents towards Africa. This article is mainly divided into two parts: the first provides a brief historical connection between Africa and India through the oceanic connection; the second focuses on contemporary and common perspectives such as the economy, strategy, diplomacy, sustainability, and pollution concerns related to the oceanic groupings of Africa and India while analysing the role of the IORA.

Keywords: Africa, India, Indian Ocean, IORA, decolonisation

Introduction

The oceanic spaces between Africa and India are generally understood as the new strategic, security, and economic hot spots of the twenty-first century (Kaplan, 2010; Mohan, 2012). These oceanic spaces have often been influenced by various actors, and oceanic groupings also act as common actors. Oceanic groupings aren't formally defined by social scientists. However, oceanic groupings could be understood in terms of the act or process of combining the oceanic spaces or regions related to oceanic spaces through various organisations, or more specifically, "a regional organisation or body that brings together countries or entities with common maritime and regional interests. These groupings typically focus on issues related to the economic, political, strategic, and environmental concerns of the oceans and coastal areas. Oceanic groupings can take many forms, such as regional organizations, international treaties, or informal associations. They can be established at the global, regional, or sub-regional level. Their main goal is to promote cooperation and coordination among member countries or entities on maritime issues, such as trade, investment,

fisheries management, marine conservation, maritime security, and coastal zone development." Maritime interests can be complex and multifaceted, involving a wide range of stakeholders, including governments, private sector companies, and civil society organizations.

Oceanic groupings of Africa and India

Oceanic groupings in the context of Africa and India refer to the various regional organisations or bodies that are focused on issues related to vast maritime interests. These organisations usually focus on common strategic, economic, and political aspects and related areas such as maritime security, fisheries management, and the protection of marine resources with sustainable consumption. There are nine African member countries: Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania, Comoros, Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique, and South Africa, which are geographically situated on the eastern and southern coasts of the continent; and one observer country, Egypt, which is situated on the northern part of the continent, hence covering the western part of the Indian Ocean in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA).



Fig 1: Member states of the IORA, 2017

There are traces of trade linkages from ancient sea routes. Eastern Africa, from Somalia to South Africa, was part of the Indian Ocean trading system from ancient times. Copal from an early second millennium BC Iraqi burial and banana cultigens from Southeast Asia into Africa in the early first millennium BC indicate this. "The Periplus Maris Erythraei," a first-century AD Greek maritime guide, describes Roman, Arab, and Indian sea trade from Somali "far side" harbours and Azania to Rhapta (the Tanzanian coast) (Gupta, 2016). Later on, during the eighth century AD, this trade recorded a surge. The African slave trade to Asia across the Sahara Desert, over the Red Sea, and from the coast of East Africa was conducted in each of these oceanic regions, specifically to India (Collins, 2006).

The modern history of oceanic grouping between Africa and India can be traced back to the early twentieth century when both regions began to develop their own maritime interests and policies. The modern history of linkages was directly subjected to British colonialism. There is a direct link between British India and British Africa. Kenya in east Africa was the economic centre of British colonialism, and from here, Britishers were trying to control the whole eastern coastline region of the continent. Both Africa and India have encountered the colonial consequences of British imperialism, and both regions have similar colonial baggage. India, after becoming independent of the British, led the global south towards the establishment of the NAM under the leadership of Nehru and other leaders of the global south, hence both regions have the global south's solidarity against the colonialism and imperialism practises of the global north. However, formal cooperation and coordination on maritime issues between Africa and India did not begin in earnest until the latter part of the twentieth century.

In the 1980s and 1990s, India and several African countries began to establish bilateral agreements and cooperation initiatives on maritime issues. These early efforts focused primarily on trade and investment and on the development of coastal and port infrastructure. Contemporary history also covers a major part of the growth and development of the strategic importance of the oceanic regions between Africa and India. The second phase of the cold war was the major turning point in terms of the strategic significance of the oceanic spaces between Africa and India, which is majorly the Indian ocean. The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and its connections and relations with the global south, specifically with Africa, was well recognised by independent India during and after the Cold War.

During and after the Cold War, the militarization of oceanic spaces by assertion, influence, and control started all over the globe. Africa and India were major subjects of capitalist and communist blocs during the cold war. The oceanic spaces of these regions, including African countries, especially coastal ones, were armed and had advanced naval equipment. The USSA and USSR established naval outposts on the continent and provided African countries with military aid to expand their naval forces. Even though the Cold War was officially over in 1991, the militarization of the oceanic space of Africa continues to be a complicated subject that includes a variety of actors and issues. It was the time of the deinstallation of the bases of the major colonial powers and superpowers from the oceanic and coastal regions of Africa and India. India also intervened in Uganda by sending its military coups through Tanzania

when Uganda launched the policy of "Africanisation" and asked Indians to leave under the dictatorship of Idi Amin. After South Africa became independent in 1994, Nelson Mandela came to India with a vision of oceanic cooperation between India and Africa.

"The 'natural urge of the facts of history and geography' that Nehru spoke of, should broaden itself to include exploring the concept of an Indian Ocean Rim of socio-economic co-operation and other peaceful endeavours; of a special relationship that should help improve a lot of the developing nations in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, Commonwealth and Non-Aligned Movement."

On January 25, 1995, Mandela delivered the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation Lecture

This resulted in the establishment of the IORA (Indian Ocean Rim Association), an intergovernmental organisation that was established on March 7, 1997. In the early 21st century, cooperation between Africa and India on maritime issues began to expand and deepen with the establishment of several new oceanic groupings and initiatives. One of the most notable of these was the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which was established in 1997 and brings together countries from around the Indian Ocean region, including several African countries, to promote cooperation on issues such as trade, investment, and maritime security. Its major mandate is to "facilitate and encourage economic cooperation by bringing together representatives from the governments, businesses, and academic institutions of Member States, among other groups." In the spirit of multilateralism, the Association uses a consensus-based, evolutionary, and non-intrusive approach to build and develop mutually beneficial understanding and cooperation.

IORA is focusing on strengthening institutions and capacities. India revitalised IORA under its leadership and established six goals to achieve sustainable growth and balanced development in the Indian Ocean Region. IORA works towards "maritime safety and security, trade and investment facilitation, fisheries management, disaster risk management, tourism and cultural exchanges, academic, science, and technology cooperation, the blue economy, and women's economic environment." There are several flagship projects like the Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD), the Somalia and Yemen Development Program (SYDP), the IORA Sustainable Development Program (ISDP), the IORA-Nelson Mandela Be the Legacy Programme, and the IORA-UN Women Women's Economic Empowerment Project.

In recent years, other oceanic groupings and initiatives between Africa and India have been established, such as the Africa-India Forum Summit (AIFS), the Africa-India Field Training Exercise (AFINDEX), and the Africa-India Partnership for Blue Economy. The history of oceanic grouping between Africa and India is ongoing, and both regions continue to work together to address common maritime interests and challenges, such as the sustainable use of ocean resources, maritime security, and coastal zone development.

Strategic and maritime security

The strategic and maritime security aspects of the oceanic groupings relate to the further exploration of the ocean for economic development with peace, security, conservation, and dispute resolution. Maritime challenges such as illegal fishing, piracy, and human trafficking through the channel and routes of the ocean; negotiation of international agreements for the protection of the oceanic resources; collaboration on peace and growth; and mechanisms for resolving the disputes over maritime boundaries, fishing rights, and stability in the regions Oceanic groupings play a significant role in fostering regional cooperation and addressing marine challenges in the ocean; as a result, their member states consider them to have strategic relevance in their international affairs.

Decolonisation of oceanic spaces

There is a historical strategic rivalry between Britain and France over the oceanic parts of the world, which significantly got strained during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The two major colonial powers were continually trying to enhance their presence in global oceanic waters, specifically in the Indian Ocean, due to the abundance of natural and human resources. Due to various natural and topographical reasons, Britain emerged and remained a naval superpower till the early twentieth century, meanwhile France was also trying to rebuild and restrengthen its naval power due to the control of its south-east Asian and African colonies. This strategic rivalry was sustained till the second world war and altered the then geopolitical sphere of international politics, putting the global south as merely an object to strengthen its global presence. This strategic rivalry resulted in various long-term implications for the global south oceanic waters, like the continuity of wars and massive weaponisation of the oceanic spaces, the ultimate loss of natural resources of the oceans due to continuing wars over oceans, and extraction of oceanic resources from the oceans of the global south to sustain its rivalry.

NAM and OAU/AU in particular together focused on massive decolonisation agenda, which also included the oceanic spaces. From 1963–2013, Africa concentrated on decolonisation and political independence. OAU/AU, which led the decolonisation process, recommitted the continent to the Pan-African Vision of an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa, driven by its people. The NAM has also been an important participant in the worldwide movement to promote decolonisation. Its involvement in advancing the independence of its member nations and supporting their attempts to confront the colonial legacy has shaped the geopolitical environment throughout the world.

Agenda 2063 also prioritises decolonisation in order to confront colonialism and foster African countries' political, economic, and cultural independence. This involves encouraging the Africanisation of enterprises and the integration of African economies, which also include oceanic spaces. Oceanic decolonisation is also considered the regaining of sovereignty over oceanic resources and spaces colonised by major colonial powers. The UNCLOS was a significant factor in oceanic decolonisation which developed a new legal framework for oceanic control and management and provided a chance for global south countries to claim and control marine resources. Many former colonial powers had to renegotiate oceanic resources

and spaces. This enabled colonies to reclaim their oceanic spaces and resources.

Demand for secure space

There are some common factors that contribute to the demand for secure oceanic spaces globally and in the Indian Ocean. These factors include the significance of the oceans as a sustainable source of trade, food, and energy, as well as concerns over piracy, terrorism, and the overexploitation of maritime resources. Due to their critical position and the wide variety of actors operating in the area, the oceanic spaces of India and Africa face particular problems and demands for security. The most important factor is the security of economic assets needed for economic growth and development in the regions connected to the oceanic spaces.

The continuous expansion of the world economy and the growing dependence on the ocean as a crucial transportation route are major factors influencing the need for safe oceanic regions in the Indian Ocean. The security of these maritime transportation routes is essential to the functioning of the world economy since the Indian Ocean region is situated along some of the largest maritime routes in the world, particularly those interconnecting Europe, Africa, and Asia. Ghosh (2020) stated, "Around 80 per cent of the world's maritime oil trade passes through the IOR, and more than 75 per cent of the world's maritime trade and 50 per cent of daily global oil transfers pass through the region."

The major demand for secure spaces includes "the stability and security of energy resources such as petroleum." The growing significance of the area as a source of energy, particularly oil and natural gas, is another aspect that contributes to the requirement for secure oceanic spaces in the Indian Ocean region. The region surrounding the Indian Ocean has an abundance of gas and oil deposits, and the safeguarding of these resources is essential to the energy security of the Indian Ocean's surrounding countries.

Piracy as a major concern

Piracy in the Indian Ocean region is another significant issue that continues to alter the security of the economic assets in this region. In addition to affecting transportation and commerce, piracy in the Indian Ocean has broader consequences for global security and stability. The regions around the Indian Ocean, particularly the west coast of Africa and the coasts of Djibouti and Somalia, have been overrun with pirates. The expanse of the Indian Ocean, along with the absence of efficient coastal surveillance and military presence, has made it easier for pirates to target commercial vessels. Somalia's political instability, which has enabled criminal groups to operate with relative liberty, has worsened the situation. There have been initiatives to prevent piracy in the Indian Ocean, including enhanced patrols by multinational navies, regional coordination, and steps to enhance vessel security. However, the issue remains as long as pirates keep targeting ships in the region. The problem is quite different because these regions have a nexus of military and political elites, particularly in Somalia. Pirates usually flee after looting, and due to the nexus, all systems of prevention of piracy have failed. The functional relationship between people and the state is fractured, and many other issues are also adding to these problems. Rather than that, many terrorist groups are also active, and the major cause of the activeness of these

militias is the overflow of criminal elements due to Christian and Islamic xenophobic mobilisations from different frictions at the global level. These criminal elements mostly went to the oceans for piracy, and there are organisations but no agency to prevent this due to the broken functionality of the state.

China's Intervention in the Indian Ocean Region

Chinese presence and intervention in the Indian Ocean region have also become an important geostrategic question due to their complicated approach not only for India but for African states as well. China is increasing its engagements in ICT, industry, and the acquisition of raw material markets for the extraction of subsoil and maritime resources. China's approach is based on the "competition" of western economies, as somehow seen in terms of the trade war with the USA. India's approach is humanitarian and always based on the principles of "Vashudhaiv Kutumbkam," which are also similar to the African philosophy of "ubuntu." Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is aiming to establish strong footholds in the countries of the Indian Ocean Region, Africa, and other island nations (Ghosh, 2020). The "String of Pearls" explains China's perspective and intentions towards the establishment of commercial and infrastructure projects in India's backyard. China has maintained a presence in the region that encompasses the Indian Ocean for a very long time. The majority of China's oil and gas supplies pass through the sea routes of the Indian Ocean, making this area very essential for China's efforts to maintain its energy independence. China's growing presence and economic investment are critical for India's geostrategic and geopolitical presence, its relations with Africa, and the security of its economic assets in the Indian Ocean region.

Peace leads to a good economy.

Maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean region, which links Asia, Africa, and Europe, is crucial for the global economy since interruptions to maritime routes might have serious implications. Recently, economic interdependence in the Indian Ocean region has focused on marine security, trade facilitation, and infrastructure development. The region's growing importance in the global economy and competition for resources and dominance has also contributed, and the "Indian Ocean Rim Association" (IORA) promotes regional economic and social cooperation while the "Indian Ocean Naval Symposium" (IONS) promotes maritime security. AEC also has a pan-African security architecture and an African governance architecture that is working towards the containment of conflicts by raising containment forces, standing forces, direct attack, and conflict cost.

Cooperative and competitive space

It is highly important because different local, regional, and global actors pursue a variety of interests and engage in both cooperative and conflicting behaviour. However, IORA has fostered regional cooperation on trade, security, and environmental preservation with its 21 member states. There are numerous actors who are continually competing for power and influence in the area. This is especially true in geo-security, where countries like China and India compete with regional powers like Iran and Saudi Arabia, which further might disturb regional peace and stability. In

addition, competition for extractive resources, such as oil and gas reserves, has led to a surge in exploration and extraction operations in the region, as well as the construction of infrastructure to further sustain and support these activities. This has also resulted in long-term consequences and concerns over the prospects of environmental deterioration and resource access challenges.

Open Regionalism

Oceanic groupings are working towards the philosophy of open regionalism, which is a trading strategy in which countries sign FTAs with non-regional countries in addition to or instead of PTAs. It also refers to the idea of encouraging regional integration by establishing open and inclusive regional organisations that permit the involvement of non-regional players and further promote cross-regional collaboration. IORA is an open regional organisation in the Indian Ocean that promotes commerce, investment, capacity development, and disaster risk mitigation to promote economic, social, and cultural engagement. To promote regional cooperation and integration, IORA also collaborates extensively with other regional organisations and international actors, such as the African Union, ASEAN, and the United Nations.

Africanisation of the forces

Africanisation is the process of shifting security and defence agencies from foreign actors to African nations and regional organisations by reducing external intervention, indigenisation of conflict containment forces with UN collaboration, and undertaking post-conflict restructuring and reconstruction. It is also evident in African nations' greater involvement in regional and international security and defence organisations and the formation of platforms for dialogue and cooperation on security and military matters. Meanwhile, the securitisation of the oceanic space, responsibilities, and challenges are responded to by IORA, hence filling the vacuum and gap created by states, regional institutions, and global institutions.

The way towards blue economy

The blue economy sustainably uses ocean resources for economic development, better livelihoods, and job creation in fishing, aquaculture, tourism, shipping, and renewable energy. IORA has acknowledged the significance of the blue economy and has been actively striving to encourage the development of a sustainable economy in the Indian Ocean region. IORA has also established a Working Group on Blue Economy to provide a platform for its member states to collaborate and share best practises on issues related to the blue economy. IORA has placed a primary emphasis on a number of critical domains, including the following, in order to provide assistance to the blue economy in the region of the Indian Ocean: IORA is working to improve marine safety and security in the area, which is crucial for the growth of the blue economy; one of IORA's primary goals is to advance sustainable fisheries management methods, which are essential to the continued success of the fishing sector and the preservation of marine ecosystems, further preventing bottom trawling; IORA is actively working to encourage the growth of marine tourism in the area because the Indian Ocean has several islands and tourist destinations, which have the potential to contribute to economic expansion and the creation of new employment;

In order to encourage long-term environmentally friendly economic development, IORA is investigating the viability of ocean energy sources such as wave and tidal energy, which are sustainable in nature and not like the extractive economy. IORA is also particularly working on the sustainable use and management of the ocean's resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and social well-being, including sectors such as fisheries, aquaculture, maritime transport, tourism, and ocean energy, as well as the conservation and protection of marine biodiversity at the same time.

The African Union's (AU) 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS)

It is a key initiative to promote the blue economy in Africa by developing the continent's maritime resources and infrastructure, improving governance and coordination, and enhancing regional integration and cooperation. The Africa Union 2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy is an all-encompassing strategy for the development and management of Africa's maritime resources in a sustainable manner. The AU approved the plan in 2016, with the intention of capitalising on the capability offered by Africa's oceans, seas, and coastlines to foster economic expansion, the development of new jobs, and an improvement in people's standards of living throughout the continent. This strategy aims to promote the sustainable and equitable use of Africa's marine resources, which are founded on the concepts of integrated coastal and ocean governance. Its foundation is those principles. It is governed by a variety of primary goals, including the following: "enhance maritime security;" "promote sustainable fisheries management;" "develop marine tourism;" "foster ocean energy development;" and "Strengthen coastal and marine biodiversity conservation." The plan is intended to be put into action via a variety of different initiatives, some of which include the formulation of national and regional policies and strategies, the strengthening of institutions and capacities, and the mobilisation of resources.

Natural resources are subjected to sustainable use

Oceanic groupings must prevent and stop the over-extraction of mineral resources, overfishing (by methods such as bottom trawling), degradation of both biological and oceanic populations, and controlling the environmental impact of human activities. Due to the continuously rising demand for oil, gas, minerals, and fisheries, the exploitation of Indian Ocean natural resources has become a serious concern. The region's oil, gas, minerals, and other resources have attracted numerous countries' attention. Many Indian Ocean nations, notably India, Indonesia, Iran, and Australia, depend heavily on oil and gas production. Recent offshore drilling has enhanced exploration and production in the area. The Indian Ocean's fishing sector supplies and sustains several countries. The region's aquatic vegetation remains threatened by overfishing and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing. Mining is another important industry in the Indian Ocean region, with Madagascar and Mozambique possessing considerable coal, precious stone, and rare earth metal resources. However, deforestation and soil degradation have been implicated in these resource extractions. The Indian Ocean's natural resource development has brought monetary advantages and environmental concerns. Thus, sustainable development

strategies that balance economic growth with maritime resource protection are crucial for governments in the area. Regional institutions and oceanic groupings must deal with limited infrastructure and capacity, inadequate governance, and inadequate management, and find a balance between economic development and the threat of climate change.

Issues related to pollution control

The Indian Ocean is afflicted by pollution, which threatens the ecology and ecosystem of the ocean, the environment, and the local inhabitants. Pollution comes from numerous sources in the area, including Plastic contamination is one of the biggest sources of marine pollution in the Indian Ocean. This threatens marine life and nearby populations that depend on the ocean. Chemical pollution is another reason, which derives from ships, rapid industrialization, and oil spills contaminating the Indian Ocean with toxins. This type of pollution particularly endangers humanity and marine life, particularly coral reefs and aquatic habitats. Agricultural runoff in coastal locations and agricultural operations operated by the post-colonial states contaminate the water by releasing chemicals and fertilisers. Rather than that, poor garbage management in many Indian Ocean countries also results in the release of untreated sewage and other waste into the ocean. Hereby coastline countries of IORA face a huge challenge of plastic pollution, oil spills, and industrial and agricultural pollution, mostly the garbage dumping of the global north in the global south. African Coastal and Marine Pollution Management (ACoMaP) project, African Marine Waste Network (AMWN), West Africa Marine Environmental Network (WAMEN), Barcelona convention, and UNCLOS are signed by African countries to counter these challenges.

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