



RESEARCH BRIEF 9/2022
Security Institute for Governance and Leadership in Africa

[SIGLA @ Stellenbosch](#)

Author: Ms P. Amaresh
(Geneva School of Diplomacy)

Series Editor: Professor F. Vreÿ (SIGLA)

Topic: Enhancing Military diplomacy in Indian foreign policy

Introduction

[Military diplomacy](#) (MD) also known as “defence diplomacy”, “military public diplomacy”, “strategic communication” and “soft power” enables the military to have an influence on foreign policy through other means. [The primary purpose of MD](#) is the implementation and co-formation of the state security approach, and its objective is to build stable, long-term international relations (IR) in the defence domain. In the 21st century, [the scope of diplomacy](#) is systematically developing and apart from narrow political matters, current diplomacy focuses on the issues of economic, trade, and scientific and military ties as well. Presently in International Relations (IR), MD has gained significance and is a form of diplomacy where the actions of the military also promote goodwill towards the country. Training military forces from cordial foreign nations, collective military exercises, and providing humanitarian aid for disaster relief and peacekeeping operations (PKO) form a growing part of MD.

India’s Military Diplomacy

Traditionally, diplomacy has invariably been about diplomats navigating the country’s interest. Presently [MD has arisen as an essential foreign policy](#) instrument and India is focusing on defence and hard power capabilities as well as soft power. [Growing threats and transforming global order](#) have given more significant importance to military operations other than war heightening the soft power utility.

India has leveraged MD in its external links since independence alongside a considerable, experienced military establishment from the British and by extent by projecting itself as a leader of the post-colonial world. Being the second largest army in the world, India has represented itself as a trustworthy stakeholder in the global system and utilized its armed forces in defence partnership activities at the international level.

The essence of [military force in IR](#) has transformed in the decades following India's Independence. One outcome which is the more prominent, but often overlooked is MD. Nevertheless, the increasing appeal of [MD in contemporary years](#) will require devoting extensively more, resources and equipment towards many kinds of defence activities. This comprises high-visibility military visits abroad, foreign officer training and education, humanitarian assistance and disaster [relief \(HADR\) efforts beyond India](#).

The Indian military on many occasions has offered support to people globally. The formation of the Integrated Defence Staff (IDS) and the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of the Indian Armed Forces is a promising start for a more influential and observant strategy for MD, which will lead to better accord with India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and other ministries. To advance more synergy between India's defence and foreign policies towards nations regarded as strategic, India has further initiated [2+2 dialogues](#).

To increase the international status of India in a multipolar world with complex external and internal threats, diplomacy will remain essential for India to develop into an international balancing power with MD as a key component. Some of the [major contributions](#) by the Indian armed forces towards MD in the recent years are military attaché exchanges, PKO, opening military bases, defence procurement, participation in military exercises including anti-piracy and anti-terrorism exercises, military delegation visits and training teams overseas. Other ways to enhance India's MD include strengthening of bureaucratic reforms, greater coordination between the MEA and Defence Ministry, strengthening the role of defence attaché in the embassies, increasing logistic capabilities, improving the armed forces and military administration for MD. In addition, improving the defence production sector, increasing security diplomacy with neighbours, including diplomacy as a subject in military academies, chalking out a proper MD strategy and merging it with Indian foreign policy.

India-Africa Military Diplomacy

Historical relations and robust political footings through the past inure India's bilateral ties with Africa. India and South Africa for example have robust defence relations, with frequent visits by high-ranking military officers and training representatives. Recently India has firmly moulded maritime security cooperation with Seychelles, Djibouti, Mozambique and Mauritius besides several other littoral African countries. African military personnel training at prominent Indian institutions have enabled India to build goodwill in Africa. India is likewise Africa's fourth-largest supplier of troops to PKO. Furthermore, India and Africa have held joint exercises such as the [AFINDEX-19](#) and [IBSAMAR-VI](#) and conferences such as India-Africa Defence Ministers' conference ([IADMC](#)).

India's foreign policy requires implementing new strategies in amplifying MD. To this end and for Africa India must consider cooperation to promote Africa's military technology through AI, think-tank engagement, cyber-security collaboration, expanding embassies in Africa, military aid, anti-terrorism efforts and defence exports of relevant defence systems. Africa could further collaborate with India to confront major challenges such as violence, security threats to undersea communication cables, terrorism and violent extremism, transnational organized crime cartels, and maritime security in the Western Indian Ocean.

Presently, despite the African Union (AU) being the main normative security body, cooperation with powers such as India must be considered. The AU could consider collaborating with India's MD in "[Silencing the Guns by 2030](#)" to support '[Africa's vision 2063](#)' and see a conflict-free Africa. Similarly, India can become a strategic partner to the [2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy](#) to help Africa's blue economy ambitions. The "[SAGARMALA: initiative](#)" can further help in improving Africa's blue economy which is concentrated on ports to boost Africa's embryonic shipbuilding industry while soft "Drone diplomacy" is an opportunity in MD for better connectivity in Africa.

India's Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) should increase its Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and agreements with African nations and reinforce this aspect through ministerial visits in consultation with the Indian defence ministry towards "[Para-Diplomacy](#)". Likewise, African think tanks and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) could grow their relations with Indian think tanks and regional defence forums akin to "[Shangri La Dialogue](#)" and "[Raisina Dialogue](#)".

India-Africa relationships in the post-COVID world offers a dynamic partnership, solidly built south-south security cooperation and a long-term strategic need. India-Africa MD in the coming years is of great relevance to the "[Asia Africa Growth Corridor](#)" (AAGC), "[India Brazil South Africa \(IBSA\)](#)" [dialogue forum](#) and [Blue "Brazil Russia India China South Africa \(BRICS\)](#)". Including the Western Indian Ocean (WIO) region as a common denominator for peace in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) better MD between Indian and Africa only serves to promote the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace.

Conclusion

MD is considered a low-cost, yet a high-impact geopolitical instrument in foreign policy. However, there is a need for security reforms and a strategic security doctrine in improving India's MD. Also, MEA should consider creating a an "Act Africa Policy" similar to "[Act East Policy](#)" or "[Act West Policy](#)".

India ought to comprehend as once [stated by John F. Kennedy](#), "Diplomacy and defence are not substitutes for one another, either alone would fail". Thus, India must understand this perspective in the current era of using "smart power" to address difficult policy domains. India should rethink its MD strategy and put forth a blueprint document to use MD to also reach out to and make Africa a strategic partner.

Further Reading

1. Mehta and Sidhu, "India and Africa: Forging a strategic partnership", Brookings India, 2015.
 2. Bhatia, et.al (2016), "Defence diplomacy and International military cooperation". New Delhi. Centre for Joint Warfare Studies.
-

Preethi Amaresh is a Doctoral Scholar with the Geneva School of Diplomacy, Switzerland

Email: preethiamaresh@gmail.com